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Dream and the Preternatural in the Poetry of Walter de la Mare

by

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P R E F A C E

Among those whose help in the writing of this thesis has been incalculable is Professor Ruth Harnett, my supervisor until June 1982, whom I would like to thank for her dedication, patience and diligence. Mrs Kit Mills, by the interest and consideration she has shown while typing the following pages, has been a great help in providing the impetus needed for the final stage; as have the Cooks, with their hospitality and loving care. I also wish to thank my mother and sisters and many good friends, including Liz Chapman and Dorothea Thorne, for their loyalty and faith in my ability to complete what to me seemed a lengthy task. Finally, I wish to acknowledge the constant support, practical help and inspiration of David Bunyan, as well as the encouragement of Jennie Roberts, from whose "Peace Cottage" I wrote the last part of my thesis. Her delicate, lucid poem, "Dragonflies", seems to encapsulate an important aspect of what I attempt to communicate regarding the essence of de la Mare's poetry in this study, so I quote it here:

Dragonflies
over a dark pool
transcend the actuality
of movement in space,
weave in the sun
visions of ecstasy.

And everything,
every thing for the moment
is immaculate light.

The pool waits,
sweeps on the surface
images to and fro -
until dusk,
or the possible
fracture
of singing wings.

N O T E

For the sake of clarity a brief list of abbreviations denoting works by de la Mare is provided below, although the abbreviations are also specifically indicated in the first footnote referring to each of these works:

<u>BS:</u>	<u>Best Stories of Walter de la Mare</u>
<u>BTD:</u>	<u>Behold, This Dreamer!</u>
<u>CH:</u>	<u>Come Hither</u>
<u>CP:</u>	<u>The Complete Poems of Walter de la Mare</u>
<u>DIRC:</u>	<u>Desert Islands and Robinson Crusoe</u>
<u>EOM:</u>	<u>Early One Morning in the Spring</u>
<u>MM:</u>	<u>Memoirs of a Midget</u>
<u>OE:</u>	<u>On the Edge</u>
<u>PV:</u>	<u>Private View</u>
<u>PS:</u>	<u>Pleasures and Speculations</u>
<u>SB:</u>	<u>Stories from the Bible</u>

If my spelling (as of Faërie/Faerie or praeternatural/preternatural) at times appears inconsistent, it is because I retain de la Mare's own spelling when quoting from him (see p. 50, n. 22 and p. 51, n. 37). Similarly, de la Mare's own use of punctuation is adhered to in quotations from his works.

The bibliography is presented in accordance with the guidelines set out in the MLA Handbook (recommended by Rhodes University) but as the date of first publication of a work by de la Mare seems important despite later revisions, the original date is provided in square brackets in addition to the other information deemed necessary.

Chapter One

THE LANGUAGE OF DREAM

In this chapter I hope to illustrate in general terms how de la Mare's interest in dream and the preternatural pervades his work. His views on reality and in what it truly consists will be considered and definitions provided of various terms used throughout this study. These will approximate as closely as possible the meanings they acquire through de la Mare's own use of them. Some detailed reference to his work, especially to his prose introduction to the anthology Behold, This Dreamer!¹ and to his poem "Dreams",² will provide support for the statements made. Finally, an attempt will be made to place de la Mare, briefly and in broad outline, within his literary context, again with particular reference to his interest in dream and the preternatural and where it corresponds to or deviates from what one could expect from a poet of this period.

In the course of discussing Defoe as an author, de la Mare writes that "the enduring influence of most great writers and of all poets springs out of the lifelong conflict within them between the world of their imagination and the great world without".³ On various occasions he uses the terms "actuality" or "actualism" to refer to mundane reality as opposed to the subjective vision of individuals.⁴ For de la Mare, the two worlds were fundamentally antagonistic to each other, and the second by far the more attractive. In determining the scope of his anthology Behold, This Dreamer!, he states his intention to exclude actuality as far as possible: "All that relates in life to broad daylight, to what we all call actuality, to the wholly wide-awake, and to complete consciousness is outside its aim"⁵ It is significant that de la Mare naturally associates daylight, wakefulness and actuality in these lines; for him it was no less natural to link the obverse set of ideas. Hence, for him night, dream, imagination and a "higher reality" share intimate connections, and together constitute the essential elements of that second world to which all his deepest inclinations drew him. Hence the particular interest in and focus on dream and the preternatural in his work.

Although there are difficulties involved in dealing with such apparently nebulous concepts as reality, dream, and the preternatural, examining the ways in which these various planes operate and interrelate in this poet's writings enables one to understand more fully his attitude to life. Considering the prominence and pervasiveness of dream and the preternatural in his poetry, this is hardly surprising. Not only is an area of dream or the preternatural in itself often the focus, but even when another subject is ostensibly the matter in hand (for instance, death, or the child, or love), one frequently finds that he is perceiving his topic of interest through the medium of some kind of dream, or presenting it in the light of the preternatural.

Indeed, it is possible to say that most of de la Mare's poems either imbue the mundane world with a quality of strangeness that could loosely be termed "dream-like", or deal directly with a world of fantasy, dream, or the preternatural. The problem that faces a critic is that it is often difficult to decide whether a particular poem is dealing with the familiar world in an extraordinary way, whether it is commingling two kinds of reality, namely the everyday and the preternatural, or whether it is in fact dealing exclusively with "such stuff as dreams are made on". While taking these visionary leanings as my chief interest in this study, I propose to confine myself, as far as possible, to the last two categories, and to exclude material which is not explicitly other-worldly.

With a subject which by its nature suggests mystery and vagueness, it is desirable to be as clear as possible about the meanings of the terms used. My main concern will, of course, be with de la Mare's own usages, but as these can only be arrived at obliquely, I have taken popular usage as my starting-point; de la Mare's own individual shadings will emerge later. The Oxford English Dictionary defines "dream", according to its literal usage, as a "train of thoughts, images, or fancies passing through the mind during sleep" (OED 1); and a "waking dream" is defined as a "similar involuntary vision occurring to one awake" (OED 1). Any mental consciousness experienced

during sleep is thus classified as dream, and if the involuntary nature of such an experience is transferred to waking life, it can also be termed dream. In its figurative sense, dream is defined as a "vision of the fancy voluntarily or consciously indulged in when awake (especially as being unreal or idle); a visionary anticipation, reverie, castle in the air" (OED 2); this category also includes the concept of the "day-dream".

Since a greater precision in terminology than this will prove necessary, I have preferred to distinguish between the general category "dream", which includes categories like vision and reverie (see the OED reference given above), and a dream experienced during sleep which is neither vision nor nightmare, and which will henceforth be referred to as sleeping dream, a phrase formed by way of analogy according to the OED usage of "waking dream" cited above.⁶ In Behold, This Dreamer!, de la Mare quotes a passage from Frederick Greenwood's Imagination in Dreams, which characterizes "dreams of the night":

No day-dream compares for intensity, vividness, force, wildness, with dreams of the night, and this difference seems to arise entirely from the fact that in one case imagination possesses the mind much more exclusively than in the other. It is seen at work in a condition of freedom and domination unknown to us in any other mood when awake, and in that condition it transcends all it is capable of when working in harness with other faculties⁷

Whatever de la Mare's own view of the relative intensities of sleeping and waking dreams, the quotation from Greenwood, which he offers for our attention, indicates for my purposes the salient characteristics of the sleeping dream.

"Nightmare" is probably the simplest kind of dream both to define and to identify. It is a dream experienced during sleep which is frightening, imprisoning, or in any other way distressing to the sleeper. The nightmare does not feature frequently in de la Mare's poetry, but it certainly has a place, and this is especially true with regard to his work as a whole. De la Mare's most polished novel, Memoirs of a Midget, is also his most

nightmare-ridden. Several times in this work nightmare is used as an image in depicting life,⁸ but Midgetina also suffers nightmare at a more literal level. When she is wounded, to the extent of developing a fever, by the condescension of Fanny Bowater, the beautiful but heartless young woman to whom she has lost her heart, Midgetina dreams as follows:

I was a child again and shut up in one of Mrs. Ballard's glass jars, and ... a hairy woman who was a kind of mixture of Mrs. Bowater [Fanny's mother and Midgetina's landlady] and Miss Fenne [Midgetina's puritanical spinster-aunt], was tapping with a thimble finger on its side to increase my terror.⁹

This dream suggests the heroine's sense of being imprisoned in a state of helplessness, humiliation and, in Midgetina's case, especially, diminution. In fact, her nights are sometimes "so evil with dreams"¹⁰ that she wonders: "Who hangs these tragic veils in the sleeping mind?"¹¹ This question, occurring to Midgetina directly after her recounting of a tumultuous dream, implicitly contains a descriptive definition by de la Mare of the state of nightmare.

The third category, after sleeping dream and nightmare, incorporates both reverie and day-dream, as de la Mare uses these terms interchangeably.¹² In standard usage, the term reverie subsumes the term day-dream, the latter being a specific kind of reverie. A reverie is defined as a "fit of abstracted musing, a 'brown study'" (OED 4), that is, a condition of mind not necessarily oriented towards fulfilling any specific desire, and possibly quite undirected in intention. In writing about Edward Thomas, de la Mare implicitly describes peripheral aspects of the state of reverie: "As in reverie and as if out of an enormous distance the eye sees with astonishing clearness and discrimination the things of actuality close to it, so in these poems there is this distance of time and space and this exactitude."¹³

A day-dream, on the other hand, is defined as a "dream indulged in while awake, especially one of gratified hope or ambition" (OED). The wish fulfilment motif is thus usually evident in day-dreams. ("Tartary", one of de la Mare's Songs of Childhood, beginning "If I were Lord of Tartary", is a

clear example of this.)¹⁴ De la Mare provides a descriptive definition of day-dreams when he writes that one is not necessarily dependent upon words to conjure up images of desert islands:

The imaginary island, however, need not be constructed out of words. Lovely, aloof, it may unbidden float into the mind as if like a cornucopian raft it were being drawn dulcetly on by invisible dolphins. You watch it, and "things", seemingly of their own volition, begin perhaps to "take place". It is as though, behind the proscenium of consciousness and across its "heavens" and its inner stage, there moved continually a panorama of daydream.¹⁵

While day-dreams and reverie are generally thought of as occurring to one in a waking state, a vision can occur then or during sleep. A vision is "the action or fact of seeing or contemplating something not actually present to the eye; mystical or supernatural insight or foresight" (OED 2). The adjective "visionary" means "characterised by fantasy or imagination without corresponding reality" (OED 3). Any vivid impression recorded by the mind's eye and not deriving from or corresponding to actuality (that is, external reality as ordinarily perceived) may thus be classified as vision. With regard to de la Mare, the term "vision" will not be used as synonymous with "mystical or supernatural insight or foresight" (as it easily could be in relation to poets such as Traherne or Blake), but rather in the broader sense pertaining to imaginative perception independent of actuality. A note by de la Mare in Tom Tiddler's Ground appreciatively describes visions as the "happiest, loveliest and most radiant of all dreams".¹⁶ Because a great many of de la Mare's poems deal with the twilight world between actuality and fantasy, the limits of this particular category are the most difficult to draw. Visionary poetry, even more than that of reverie and day-dreams, overlaps most with poetry dealing with the preternatural. Those poems treating, for instance, of ghosts, fairies, ogres and giants, yet containing no mention of the dreaming condition of the seer of these creatures of the imagination, could be classified as visionary. However, it will suit my purposes better to classify such poems as preternatural. When the emphasis

shifts to the dreaming state of the beholder, the poem will be considered as visionary; and, finally, if in the case of any particular poem, the beings presented exist not in apparent reality (in which case they would be classified as preternatural) but explicitly in a dream, such a poem will fall within a further category, namely that where dream acts as a literary device and simply frames the content of the poem.

There are thus two main kinds of dream poem: firstly, any poem explicitly or by implication cast in the frame of a dream (either by mention of the sleeping state of the first person speaker, or by other methods, such as employing a title which denotes a dreaming condition); secondly, the kind of poem which makes dream a fairly important part of its content. This latter category of poems concerned with dream as material may then be subdivided into the four classes of dream kinds so far mentioned, namely, sleeping dream, nightmare, reverie and day-dream, and finally, vision.

The case of hallucinations produced through the use of drugs might be expected to figure largely among those states which occupy the borderline between dream and waking actuality, especially in view of the attention given to this condition by some of the Romantics and post-Romantics. De la Mare shows interest in this question by quoting a long extract from Thomas de Quincey's Confessions of an English Opium-eater in Desert Islands and Robinson Crusoe (pp. 88-96), but seems generally to regard the state warily. With reference to Coleridge, for instance, he expresses his opinion that Coleridge "owed far more to his dreams than to the 'anodyne' that may have clouded as well as coloured them"¹⁷ De la Mare's poem "Drugged", published in 1921, presents a grim portrait of an afflicted character:

Inert in his chair,
 In a candle's guttering glow;
 His bottle empty,
 His fire sunk low;
 With drug-sealed lids shut fast,
 Unsated mouth ajar,
 This darkened phantasm walks
 Where nightmares are:

In a frenzy of life and light,
 Crisscross - a menacing throng -
 They gibe, they squeal at the stranger,
 Jostling along,
 Their faces cadaverous grey:
 While on high from an attic stare
 Horrors in beauty apparelled,
 Down the dark air.

A stream gurgles over its stones,
 The chambers within are a-fire.
 Stumble his shadowy feet
 Through shine, through mire;
 And the flames leap higher.
 In vain yelps the wainscot mouse;
 In vain beats the hour;
 Vacant his body must drowse
 Until daybreak flower -

Staining these walls with its rose,
 And the draughts of the morning shall stir
 Cold on cold brow, cold hands.
 And the wanderer
 Back to flesh house must return.
 Lone soul - in horror to see,
 Than dream more meagre and awful,
 Reality.

(CP, pp. 235-36)

For de la Mare, the drug-induced state in this case seems to introduce a new modification to the usual tension and antipathy between dream and actuality. The drug-victim's condition is so debilitated that he is offered merely a choice between nightmares, the nightmare of actuality being possibly the worse.

Perhaps, in view of his reservations about this particular means, it is the natural rather than the artificially produced state of awareness which seems particularly to interest de la Mare, among those states which occur between sleeping and waking. In a note to Isaac Watts's "The Sluggard", anthologized in Come Hither, he writes:

Indeed, to lie, between sleep and wake, when daybreak is brightening of an April or a May morning, and so listen to the far-away singing of a thrush or to the whistling of a robin or a wren is to seem to be transported back into the garden of Eden. Dreamers, too, may call themselves travellers.¹⁸

De la Mare takes this positive attitude to an ostensibly inactive state despite Isaac Watts's condemnation of sluggishness in his poem.

Again in Behold, This Dreamer!, we find interesting references to this

borderland between sleeping and waking. In the section of the introduction entitled "Hallucination?", de la Mare tells of some of his own experiences in this state. He introduces them as follows:

The experiences of dreaming and waking, moreover, may, as it were, occasionally coalesce or overlap; and the half-awakened one may be deluded into accepting the remnants of a dream as real. I treasure a scanty sheaf of this less common species - dreams, that is, which persisted for a while as hallucinations. So, conversely, the mind-stuff of waking life not only persists in dream but by denizens of dreamland may be likewise dismissed as hallucination. The 'second Me' in dreams at any rate appears to keep approximately true to kind.¹⁹

It is in this indistinct area of consciousness that it often becomes difficult to demarcate the boundary between dream and the preternatural itself:

In a brief space of time, waking consciousness may be for an instant repeatedly submerged, and may retrieve isolated peephole glimpses of an imagery at least as vivid as anything bestowed by fancy on the eye of day ...

They [these glimpses] occasionally take the form of outrageous spectres; faces malignantly intent; and with the appalling verisimilitude, as Frederick Greenwood declares, of William Blake's 'Ghost of a Flea'....²⁰

It is at this point that a definition of the preternatural seems appropriate.

Coleridge, in an attempt to distinguish the kind of material used in "Christabel" from that of "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner", differentiates between the supernatural and the preternatural. According to the critic W. J. Bate's account, he thought of the latter as "not what is necessarily above nature ... but only what is outside the ordinary course of it or inexplicable by ordinary means":

He [Coleridge] would now, he thought, be freer. For to begin with, the "supernatural" imposed a heavier burden of conscience, if not invention. It presupposed a frame of symbolic reference that would inevitably involve his own religious beliefs without his quite knowing yet where he really wanted to step or indeed felt at liberty to step.²¹

The tentative and searching quality often evident in de la Mare's work would probably have been in sympathy with Coleridge's inclination towards a less specific and more all-inclusive term, one which would leave him free to pursue a variety of aims as part of the same general endeavour. It is no doubt for

similar reasons, then, that de la Mare gives special weight to the less usual word, preternatural. My use of the term in the present context rather than "supernatural", which according to The Oxford English Dictionary is interchangeable with "preternatural", thus does no more than follow de la Mare's decided preference for the latter term. In an essay called "Naturalists", for instance, published in Pleasures and Speculations in 1940, de la Mare quotes W. H. Hudson as saying that there is "a sense of the super-natural in all natural things" (not my emphasis). Yet, a page and a half later, while discussing this very question with regard to Hudson - de la Mare's explanation of Hudson's statement being that "all beauty appeals to our delight in mystery and wonder" - de la Mare writes of "natural and praeternatural wonders", having clearly made a conscious decision in favour of "praeternatural".²² In the same essay, in discussing Hudson's "fine fawn odd-coloured horse, Cristiano", de la Mare writes: "His neigh echoingly evokes some remote vestige of ancient memories darkly interred within ourselves.... Cristiano, that is, is tinged not only with the human but with the praeter-human."²³ The prefix "praeter-" thus evokes for de la Mare associations similar to those connoted by Jung's phrase "collective unconscious" for us. This is confirmed by de la Mare's use of the term "praeternatural" in the second and final stanza of "The Brook" (CP, p. 484), published in 1945 in The Burning-Glass and Other Poems:

From what far caverns,
From what soundless deep
Of earth's blind sunless rock
Did this pure wellspring seep -
As may some praeternatural dream
In sleep?

For our purposes, it is also interesting to note de la Mare's association of the concepts of the preternatural and of dream, both here connected to the mystery concerning the origin of things.

In this study, the term preternatural will be used fairly comprehensively, and will be applied to three areas of subject matter. Firstly, under the

heading of the preternatural are included all those poems which refer to ideas about God and what is conventionally associated with Christian belief in Him. Secondly, poems treating of ghosts in any form will be similarly categorized; although ghosts in de la Mare appear in Christian and non-Christian contexts, poems in which ghosts appear are distinguished from the Christian category because of not being confined to this grouping. The final category consists of those poems which appear in de la Mare's work even more frequently than the kinds just mentioned, namely, those which deal poetically with the material of traditional folklore, that is, with beings like fairies, mermaids, giants, ogres, and dwarves, among others. The perhaps surprising inclusion of the Christian element in this list of poetic topics requires some comment, as does the whole question of the status of Christianity in de la Mare's work.

The critic Doris Ross McCrosson makes an untenable case for a lack of any sign of religious orthodoxy in de la Mare's work.²⁴ In a poem such as "The Burning-Glass", for instance, from which the volume of poetry published in 1945 derives its name, The Burning-Glass and Other Poems, de la Mare makes an almost direct statement of Christian faith. It would be difficult here not to identify the speaker with the poet himself:

No map shows my Jerusalem,
 No history my Christ;
 Another language tells of them,
 A hidden evangelist.

Words may create rare images
 Within their narrow bound;
 'Twas speechless childhood brought me these,
 As music may, in sound,

Yet not the loveliest song that ever
 Died on the evening air
 Could from my inmost heart dis sever
 What life had hidden there.

It is the blest reminder of
 What earth in shuddering bliss
 Nailed on a cross - that deathless Love -
 Through all the eternities.

I am the Judas whose perfidy
 Sold what no eye hath seen,
 The rabble in dark Gethsemane,
 And Mary Magdalene.

To very God who day and night
 Tells me my sands out-run,
 I cry in misery infinite,
 'I am thy long-lost son.'
 (CP, pp. 463-64)

In the above poem, de la Mare makes several obvious Christian references, for instance, to Gethsemane and the cross, to Judas, and to Mary Magdalene, and also calls himself God's son. Although he is seldom as explicit about his religious beliefs as here, there are many references to the God of the Old and New Testaments scattered throughout his work whose import would be incompatible with a sceptic's approach to religion. Similarly indicative is his publication in 1929 of Stories from the Bible, his "versions of but a few of the narratives related in the first nine books of the Old Testament of the Bible".²⁵ The purpose of this volume, de la Mare continues in his Introduction, is to persuade his "young readers to return to the inexhaustible wellspring from which it [this book] came".²⁶ Other indications are to be found in his poems,²⁷ among which several will be selected for close examination in the relevant section of Chapter Two. De la Mare's Christianity may be tentative, searching, and questioning, but there is certainly evidence of its presence in his writings.

After the upheavals in religious belief that occurred during the nineteenth century, an adherence to Christianity in a writer could no longer be taken for granted. There is a fair amount of anguish and doubt among the Romantics and Victorians regarding this issue. Among the Edwardian and Georgian poets, however, the general reader is as likely to find belief as doubt or disbelief. In de la Mare's case, however, the religious element in his work may be viewed as a tentative faith in an aspect of the preternatural, not entirely to be separated from his pervasive interest in ghosts and fairy beings. (In classifying ghosts and fairy beings along with aspects of Christian orthodoxy, I am not suggesting that the reality of God, for instance, is of the same order as the existence of fairies.) In "Some Fairy Tales", one of de la Mare's numerous articles written for the Times Literary

Supplement, he uses the language of orthodox religion to write about the "creed ... of Faerie", even if it is with his tongue in his cheek. He writes about "difficulties that daunt the heart even of the true believer":

Yet there never was a creed so assured yet so elusive, so profound yet so simple, so magical yet so lightly-held and so gaily contemned, as that of Faerie. Its very essence dwells in faith not works. Its humblest votary ... is infallible. And its devotees - surely the saints in Paradise are not more simple in heart. There is not the least crevice open here for philosophic doubt; no sure "pathway to reality"; and Professor James himself has not, we think, so much as mentioned this specific "variety of belief." [sic]²⁸

The seriousness with which de la Mare approaches the question of belief in the realm of Faerie will be endorsed when discussion of this particular area of the preternatural takes place a few pages further on. However, it should already be evident that, although the inclusion of both objects of popular superstition and matters of Christian belief under the heading of the preternatural is at one level a matter of convenience, it is also the result of a certain lack of orthodoxy on de la Mare's part. He implicitly draws one's attention to the fact that faith and imagination are important in both cases. In the extract quoted above, de la Mare couches the points he is making about the followers of Faerie in the language of conventional religion, and emphasizes the need for faith in this region; in "The Burning-Glass", he draws attention to the inwardness of his Christian faith, to its imaginative aspect: "No map shows my Jerusalem, / No history my Christ". The ascription of "reality" to either order of beings, those belonging to the Christian religion or to the realm of Faerie, is thus according to de la Mare dependent on the same two qualities, namely faith and imagination. A similar exhibition of both faith and imagination is required from the person receptive to the manifestation of ghosts.

In considering the question of ghosts as poetic material in de la Mare, perhaps the following extract from Silas Marner, in which some country folk are arguing about the nature of ghostly experience, will serve to illustrate

an aspect of the fascination that this topic has for de la Mare, namely its possible subjectivity:

... [S]aid the landlord, speaking in a tone of much candour and tolerance[:] "There's folks, i' my opinion, they can't see ghos'es, not if they stood as plain as a pike-staff before 'em. And there's reason i' that. For there's my wife, now, can't smell, not if she'd the strongest o' cheese under her nose. I never see'd a ghost myself; but then I says to myself, 'Very like I haven't got the smell for 'em.' ..."

.....
 "Tut, tut," he [the farrier] said, setting down his glass with refreshed irritation; "what's the smell got to do with it? Did ever a ghost give a man a black eye? That's what I should like to know. If ghos'es want me to believe in 'em, let 'em leave off skulking i' the dark and i' lonesome places - let 'em come where there's company and candles."

"As if ghos'es 'ud want to be believed in by anybody so ignirant!" said Mr Macey, in deep disgust at the farrier's crass incompetence to apprehend the conditions of ghostly phenomena.²⁹

The point George Eliot seems to be pertinently making here, albeit in terms of rural superstition, is that ghostly manifestations depend largely on the receptivity of the witness. This is a point of view which, in his slight but interesting poem called "Which?", de la Mare appears to endorse. At a subtler and less humorous level than in Silas Marner, the suggestion is made in "Which?" that the person who has interest neither in imaginative creations nor otherworldly phenomena (the exact distinction between the two is left - perhaps deliberately - imprecise) is excluded from such experiences:

'What did you say?'
 'I? Nothing.' 'No? ...'
 What was that sound?'
 'When?'
 'Then.'
 'I do not know.'
 'Whose eyes were those on us?'
 'Where?'
 'There.'
 'No eyes I saw.'
 'Speech, footfall, presence - how cold the night may be.'
 'Phantom or fantasy, it's all one to me.'
 (CP, p. 385)

The uninterested tone of voice evident in the second speaker clearly accounts for his lack of consciousness of whatever the first speaker is perceiving. The tradition which attributes whimsicality to ghosts in revealing themselves

only to those who are imaginative and therefore responsive to them would complement this idea. A poem treating of this question in a far more explicit manner is the relatively long one from Songs of Childhood called "The Phantom" (CP, pp. 33-35), in which de la Mare is at pains to suggest the imaginative receptivity of the child who has the ghostly experience: "Her eyes are yet with visions bright / Of sylph and river, flower and fay" (st. 4, CP, p. 33). This poem will receive closer attention in the third chapter on the child as dreamer.^{29a}

There is a further complication as regards ghosts in the work of de la Mare, for there clearly are times when a phantom or spectre may be viewed as either a dream or "something otherwise". In "Hallucination?", a section of de la Mare's Introduction to Behold, This Dreamer!, he recounts one of his own experiences:

... [I] merely awoke and found myself steadily scrutinising a dwarfish furtive skulking little man There he was. I was surprised to see him, but less surprised, presumably, than I should have been if I had been sure that he was real Presently, quiet as a cat, and with scarcely perceptible movements, he began to back towards the wardrobe, until at length - his outlines very gradually adapting themselves to the pattern of the mahogany panel behind him - he vanished into the wood, and was gone.³⁰

This account then closes with the provocative question: "To what degree was he of the stuff that dreams are made on, a mere illusion, a pure hallucination, or - something otherwise?" The difficulty in deciding exactly what the nature of the experience is thus seems to be a personal difficulty for de la Mare, as well as for his fictional and poetic characters, and hence for his readers; perhaps, in fact, a difficulty inherent in the matter under discussion, confusing also the frequenters of the tavern in Silas Marner.

The novel in which this problem most decisively finds expression is The Return. The main character, Arthur Lawford, is by all accounts a respectable, conventional husband to his unpleasantly pragmatic wife, Sheila, until - on a convalescent stroll after a serious attack of influenza - he dozes off in front of the grave of a certain Nicholas Sabathier. Lawford is transformed not

only inwardly but also physically by this experience, much to the horror of his conformist wife. In conversation with a sympathetic couple called Herbert and Grisel, a brother and his sister, Lawford comes to accept that he has been "Sabathiered".³¹ The suggestion is that this condition involves "something otherwise" and is not simply "mere illusion, or pure hallucination", but in the end it is impossible, for both the characters and the reader, to be certain. In many of his short stories, too, de la Mare seems almost to delight in a certain ambivalence in the tone of his conclusions, as though a mysterious evasiveness were one of his goals.

"Seaton's Aunt" is an example of this.³² The evil presence of the aunt pervades the atmosphere of the entire short story. The suggestion is that she is responsible for Seaton's death. The narrator's visit elicits a strange reaction from her, which hints that she considers herself still to be in communication with her poor victimized nephew, the now dead Seaton, whose death remains unexplained but is surrounded by sinister overtones.

There are, however, unambiguous ghosts in de la Mare. In one of his short stories, "The Green Room", a ghost appears in strikingly explicit form.³³ A young man, frequenter of a certain antiquarian bookshop, is eventually permitted to browse in the bookdealer's sanctuary, namely "the green room". Here, "out of some day-dream, it seemed, of which until then he had been unaware, there had appeared to him from the world of fantasy the image of a face":

No known or remembered face - a phantom face, as alien and inscrutable as are the apparitions that occasionally visit the mind in sleep. This in itself was not a very unusual experience. Alan was a young man of imaginative temperament, and possessed that inward eye which is often, though not unfailingly, the bliss of solitude. And yet there was a difference. This homeless image was at once so real in effect, so clear, and yet so unexpected.³⁴

The references to "out of some day-dream" and "from the world of fantasy" are significant in so far as they retain even here de la Mare's sense of a connection between the imaginative and supernatural worlds. But subsequent

events prove that the supernatural presence is even more concrete than is presupposed by his "in effect" (that is, in the impression it made). Nonetheless, it is interesting to note how deliberately de la Mare makes a point of communicating to his reader the "imaginative temperament" that this young man possessed. He discovers the diary of the woman to whom the now tortured spectral face belonged, and feels commissioned to have the poems he finds scattered throughout her memoirs published. "Infatuated young man, he was in servitude to one who had left the world years before he was born, and had left it, it seemed, only the sweeter by her exit. He was sick for love of one who was once alive but was now dead, and ... damned."³⁵ Despite the suggestion in both The Return and "The Green Room" that the spectral beings are damned ones, a not unusual attitude to ghosts, especially from an orthodox Christian perspective, this is by no means always the case in de la Mare's ghostly accounts, as in the previously mentioned poem, "The Phantom".

The third category of the preternatural requiring clarification concerns the realm of Faerie. In the Preface to her Dictionary of Fairies, Katharine Briggs defines "two main general usages" of the word "fairy", as follows:

The first is the narrow, exact use of the word to express one species of those supernatural creatures "of a middle nature between man and angels" - as they were described in the seventeenth century - varying in size, in powers, in span of life and in moral attributes, but sharply differing from other species such as hobgoblins, monsters, hags, merpeople and so on. The second is the more general extension of the word to cover that whole area of the supernatural which is not claimed by angels, devils or ghosts.³⁶

It is in the "second, later and more generalized sense" that Katharine Briggs often uses the term in her book. In this study, the term "fairy beings" will replace this broad sense of "fairy". Thus, when creatures such as giants, ogres, mermaids, naiads, and fairies as one category of the preternatural are being referred to, it will be under the heading of fairy beings. The word "fairy" will be reserved for reference to the kind of creature described in Katharine Briggs's first definition.

Since witches are human beings, they do not belong to the category of fairy beings, but they are not unrelated. A witch is defined as a "female magician, sorceress; ... a woman supposed to have dealings with the devil or evil spirits and to be able by their co-operation to perform supernatural acts" (OED 1). Because of their contact with magic, witches will be considered as part of the preternatural material dealt with by de la Mare. In Chapter Two de la Mare's poems on the subject of witches will therefore also be discussed under the broad heading of the preternatural, as a category related to that of fairy beings.

De la Mare appears to use the term "fairy" in its narrow sense, employing generalised phrases when wishing to imply a wider scope of reference. His own colouring of the subject emerges from some remarks on Shakespeare's non-human characters in A Midsummer Night's Dream:

With the oreades and naiades and dryades, these nymphs, lovely denizens of man's imagination, dwell in the golden haze of that region of romance which is beyond earthly time and space. And from them has come down to us, unless we have wholly banished them not only from our credence but also from our imaginative conception, the whole host of 'Phairie' or Faërie, the Silent Folk.³⁷

This passage makes it clear that de la Mare has not "banished ... the whole host of ... Faërie ... from his imaginative conception", and perhaps not even altogether from his "credence". The attitudes emerging from a book review he wrote for the Times Literary Supplement suggest that, despite his education and sophistication, he shared with the primitives (and others) of former times at least a part of their faith in the world of Faerie. In this respect he retains an important ingredient of the popular tradition, where the existence of fairy beings was implicitly believed in. The blending of ingredients from popular and literary traditions in English literature has its roots as far back as Chaucer and the medieval poets, and is continued with writers like Spenser and Shakespeare. But, in de la Mare's case, the ardour of his defence on occasion of the possible existence of fairies suggests that his use of fairies is more than a mere literary convention.

In this review (mentioned above) of a book which offers a critical history of fairy lore, The Fairies - Here and Now by S. R. Littlewood, de la Mare becomes uncharacteristically scathing about Littlewood's scepticism. His resentment is evidently directed at Littlewood's refusal to acknowledge the possible existence of fairies (they are thus "banished ... from [his] credence"), and at his conceding them only a minor position in his undefined "imaginative conception". De la Mare regrets that for Littlewood the supposed absence among his contemporaries of any real (believing) response to fairy stories "matters no more than if 'at a doll's tea-party there is no tea.'":

Indeed, there never was such a scepticism as Mr Littlewood's. Not only does he refuse to believe in fairies except as puppetry of the imagination (an imagination whose "realm" and "freedom" he makes no attempt to define), but he poisons all conceivable evidence of their real existence that may be forthcoming.³⁸

In contrast to Littlewood, de la Mare makes an implicit statement of faith in the opening paragraph of the article:

... But the fairies are a secret and silent folk. If Mr Littlewood has never seen them - except in fancy - we can at least console ourselves with the reflection that they have probably never seen him. So no shrill anger will greet this human's affront. Hazed with silence will the hill remain and the solitary places. And yet one would rather not stand in Mr Littlewood's shoes just now nor dream his unlulled dreams on the cold hillside. Not because of any instant vengeance that is likely to befall him, but because he may be left rather awfully alone.

The cutting tone of this paragraph reveals de la Mare's depth of feeling on this subject, especially where he senses a threat to the attitude he implicitly endorses. The article as a whole makes it clear that de la Mare is open to persuasion regarding the existence of fairies, and even were conclusive evidence not forthcoming, his conviction of their imaginative reality would remain. De la Mare ironically depicts Littlewood's presentation of the matter:

It amounts roughly to this. In the dark backward of time fairies were the offspring of primitive imaginations, and belief in them was related to religion. We have rejected the religious element, but

still have (shall we say vestiges of) imagination. Fairies, then, are now purely "imaginary" creatures, with no independent life or being - or worse, mere Christianized humanizations of natural phenomena whose only office is to edify and please. They may even - ghastly thought - fly hither and thither on "missions of good deeds." [sic] Of old, men feared them. That fear is gone; belief, therefore, has vanished with it.

This last assertion made by Littlewood that "belief ... has vanished with [fear]" de la Mare refers to as a "dubious point". In a later paragraph, he implicitly rejects Littlewood's idea that "[i]t is all make-believe", and that "there is now no fear nor forbidding, no real quickening of spirit or strangeness, no ichor-nourished exquisiteness of the air". Again, the intensity of de la Mare's tone suggests the extent to which the matter affects him personally, and implies by contrast his own belief, in the sense that he quite firmly rejects what he does not believe. He indicates that at an imaginative level, at least, he takes fairies seriously; they are to him clearly not "toys of fancy" and have an "independent life or being". Furthermore, he implies that their existence is a matter quite apart from Christianity - it is certainly not an aspect of the latter. Nonetheless, an attitude of faith is as necessary and appropriate when dealing with the "Little People" as with God and his heavenly hosts. This view emerges equally strongly in "Some Fairy Tales", the Times Literary Supplement article cited earlier in this chapter.³⁹ De la Mare suggests his own lack of orthodoxy when he ends the review with an objection to Littlewood's claim that he speaks as the "'average educated'" English person:

Sole consideration for the orthodox is Mr. Littlewood's deliciously naive answer to his first crucial question "Who are 'we'"? [sic] "We are just ourselves," he replies, and ourselves are "the average educated Englishmen and Englishwomen of to-day." ... As if there ever was - except in the vacuum of abstractions - such a thing as an educated "average." [sic]

The withering quality of de la Mare's tone culminates in his closing comment: "If ever fairy haunted green, wood, or mound, Tom, Dick, and Harry, it is certain, were not his chosen cronies, 'Average!'" [sic]

The review discussed above, as well as the one previously mentioned, "Some Fairy Tales", indicates that de la Mare takes the question of fairies seriously. In "Dream and Imagination", the Introduction to Behold, This Dreamer!, he regards even lesser aspects of superstition, such as rattling money in one's pocket after "a chance glimpse through a window-glass ... of that slim familiar crescent returned again into the west", in a profound light:

... Shallow superstitions ... may spring out of a realization of wonder and mystery, and from the conviction that our senses are not the only trustworthy witnesses in this world, but that nature itself resembles a veil over some further reality of which the imagination in its visionary moments seems to achieve a more direct evidence.⁴⁰

In Tea with Walter de la Mare, Russell Brain reports a revealing remark made by the poet to the effect that "he would find it hard to choose between living in dreams and real life".⁴¹ For the student of de la Mare's work the most obvious source of reference to dream, its various attributes, and a range of possible attitudes towards it as a state of consciousness, is Behold, This Dreamer!, published in 1939. It is especially in the sections comprising the Introduction entitled "Dream and Imagination" that an illumination of de la Mare's own views on the issue is found. Numerous statements of commitment to this ostensibly irrational mode of perception are here made, and other indications of conviction regarding the positive value of cultivating one's dream life pervade these introductory sections or essays. In justifying the focus of his anthology, for instance, de la Mare employs mathematical evidence (of a pragmatical, not a statistical kind):

... One aggregate year out of three is spent ... on the borderland of consciousness, or on its furthest outskirts, or beyond them, and in a state and region which may still merit the compliment of being called life and experience, however widely and oddly either of them differ from that of the waking day.⁴²

However, this is not his chief reason for devoting so much of his talent and energy to exploring this realm of human experience. It is rather the result of a conviction:

... [I]n spite of its follies and fatuities, its mummery and makebelieve, its specious dovetailing and jigsawing, dream-life is self-life The mind's life asleep and awake may be continuous; and there need be no rivalry between them. But if there is any salient difference, the give or take is not on one side only.⁴³

The inclusion of a particular viewpoint by an anthologist by no means necessarily indicates sympathy on his part with the given approach. Nevertheless, it is interesting to note a measure of correspondence between the sentiments expressed by de la Mare in the passage quoted above and those expressed by Alice Meynell, the contemporary essayist and poet, cited by de la Mare in his anthology: "And as to choosing between day and night, or guessing whether the state of day or dark is the truer and more natural, he would be rash who should make too sure."⁴⁴

The first point which emerges is that de la Mare endorses the validity of dream as experience. It is interesting to note his claim to "have spent in sleep a far more active and adventurous existence than ha[d] been [his] outward lot in the waking day".⁴⁵ He goes so far as to identify with Catherine Earnshaw's viewpoint as she expresses it in Wuthering Heights, which he quotes in both his anthology Love⁴⁶ and the earlier Behold, This Dreamer!:

"I have dreamed often in my life", says Cathie in Wuthering Heights, "dreams that have stayed with me ever after, and changed my ideas; they have gone through and through me, like wine through water, and altered the colour of my mind." That, surely, is the very voice of Emily Brontë herself. And with due qualifications, this has been my experience also.⁴⁷

As such quotations imply, dream has been important to de la Mare not merely in his personal life but also in his larger conception of reality.

Interestingly, it is in the part of the Introduction to Behold, This Dreamer! where he considers the relationship first between dream and poetry, and then between dream and death, that de la Mare touches on his views of reality, or rather, of the various levels of reality, and where dream fits in. He does not always contrast dream and actuality; often the two are viewed as forming complementary rather than mutually exclusive aspects of life. In discussing, for instance, the restoration of serenity and loveliness

to the troubled mind, de la Mare writes that thus "the further reality is once more charged with mystery". Again, he is suggesting that "the further reality" is the one which primarily interests him as opposed to the nearer, more immediate mundane reality, where we are "[b]urdened with the complexity of the lives we lead, fretting over appearances, netted in with anxieties and apprehensions, half smothered in the drifts of tepid thoughts and tepid feelings, and may refuse what poetry has to give".⁴⁸

In "The Owl", from The Veil and Other Poems, the suggestion seems to be made that the "further reality" is perhaps dream itself, and that this could be where the spirit goes when departing from life:

What if to edge of dream,
When the spirit is come,
Shriek the hunting owl,
And summon it home -
To the fear-stirred heart
And the ancient dread
Of man, when cold root or stone
Pillowed roofless head?

Clangs not at last the hour
When roof shelters not;
And the ears are deaf,
And all fears forgot:
Since the spirit too far has fared
For summoning scream
Of any strange fowl on earth
To shatter its dream?
(CP, p. 256)

The first stanza suggests the fear of the unknown which is man's inheritance, an aspect perhaps of his collective unconscious: "the ancient dread / Of man". The second stanza, however, carries the reader beyond this border state to the subsequent state when "the spirit too far has fared" for its newfound dream reality to be shattered. This further state could be death; it could also possibly refer to the "utmost scope" of fantasy, which one is warned against in "The Imagination's Pride" (CP, pp. 243-44):

But not toward nightmare goad a mind awake,
Nor to forbidden horizons bend thy sail -
Seductive outskirts whence in trance prolonged
Thy gaze, at stretch of what is sane-secure,
Dreams out on steeps by shapes demoniac thronged
And vales wherein alone the dead endure.

.....
 Bethink thee: every enticing league thou wend
 Beyond the mark where life its bound hath set
 Will lead thee at length where human pathways end
 And the dark enemy spreads his maddening net.
 (st. 2-3, CP, p. 244)

The phrases "forbidden horizons", "[s]eductive outskirts" and "[b]eyond the mark" echo the idea expressed in "The Owl" that the spirit may venture beyond the boundaries which are safe; in "The Imagination's Pride" there is no ambiguity, though, regarding man's control and choice in this matter - the kind of dream referred to is clearly one voluntarily indulged in, with "a mind awake".

In the final section of "Dream and Imagination", entitled "The Bourne", de la Mare plays with various writers' concepts of the kind of reality we shall know in death. In mentioning Christina Rossetti's idea that "we may die into a state of dreaming", he continues: "However that may be, any such state would surely resemble more closely the state of dreaming than that of the life of our earthly day."⁴⁹ In the same section, de la Mare refers to an occasion when Monk Gibbon, a friend, in his work "He Questions His Mind After Sleep", suggests that, in comprehending more fully our dreams and their reality, we may learn more of "the place to which [we] one day go". Thus de la Mare is speculating that the reality of death may be connected to the condition of dreaming, and suggesting that this is at least more probable than the correspondence of the after life to the world of actuality. The penultimate poem in The Veil and Other Poems, entitled "The Last Coachload", seems to endorse this speculation:

All journeying done. Rest now from lash and spur -
 Laughing and weeping, shoulder and elbow - 'twould seem
 That Coach capacious all Infinity were,
 And these the fabulous figments of a dream.

(CP, p. 257)

By "these" presumably is meant the various aspects of 'Paradise!', a word uttered with a sigh of relief by the occupants of the Coach on reaching their destination which supremely represents "[r]est" - from intense fluctuations in

emotion, from jostling crowds. There is a certain precariousness still inherent in the situation, however, as they are "frenzied ... / Lest rouse the Old Enemy from his death-still swoon". The "Old Enemy" appears to be Time, "'Old Father Time - Time - Time!'" (st. 4, CP, p. 256); and the end of the journey would then be the entry into a state of timelessness, or death. The suggestion inherent in the phrase, "the fabulous figments of a dream", is that the after life will remind us of dream experiences in life rather than of actual experiences. "What might then chiefly engage ourselves ... might be our dream-self and our dream-life; now at long last made coherent and complete."⁵⁰ It is significant that de la Mare, like St Paul in I Corinthians 13, looked forward to "knowing all things" beyond death, but is concerned especially with coherence and completion of his "dream-self and ... dream-life".

In "The Bourne", the source of the citations on death referred to above, de la Mare introduces one of Alice's experiences from Through the Looking-Glass as her "initiation into this little mystery", the mystery being, in de la Mare's view, that what we take to be life may be a dream. The extract he gives is Alice's visit to the Red King; she is escorted by Tweedledum and Tweedledee:

"He's dreaming now," said Tweedledee: "and what do you think he's dreaming about?"
 'Alice said, "Nobody can guess that."
 "'Why, about you!" Tweedledee exclaimed, clapping his hands triumphantly. "And if he left off dreaming about you, where do you suppose you'd be?"⁵¹

For Bishop Berkeley, existence depended on God's waking vision; in Lewis Carroll's humorous presentation, Alice in her dreams is confronted with the possibility that her very existence may be dependent on someone's (or some other being's) inadvertent dream, in this case the Red King's. De la Mare, like Bishop Berkeley and Carroll before him, is clearly treating seriously the possibility that dream life is ultimate reality, which perhaps consists of God's dream. This is shown by the context in which he quotes the teasing

puzzle presented to Alice by the brothers: grave speculations as to what may constitute the reality man faces beyond death.

In "A Riddle", also from The Veil and Other Poems, de la Mare asks a question not unlike that raised by Bishop Berkeley, when he casts doubt on the independent existence of matter outside of man's consciousness of it:

O restless thought,
Contented not! With 'Why' distraught.
Whom asked you then your riddle small? -
'If hither came no man at all

'Through this grey-green, dead-haunted lane,
Would it mere blackened naught remain?
Strives it this beauty and life to express
Only in human consciousness? ...'
(CP, p. 255)

The question posed in the stanza quoted above is preceded by asking whether beautiful natural scenery may not "mere blackened naught remain" in the absence of an appreciative human consciousness. The suggestion made in the answering question of the final stanza, however, is that matter is not dependent on man for its existence; rather, man is simply not sufficiently aware of God as the source of all things:

'Or, rather, breaks he in
To an Eden innocent of sin;
And, prouder than to be afraid,
Forgets his Maker in the made?'

However, de la Mare is not dogmatic. In this area, some ambiguities are not resolvable; and that, for the poet, is part of the attraction. The intriguing issue to de la Mare is clearly the uncertainty implicit in attempting to establish the source of life and true reality. De la Mare, like Fromm in the following extract, thinks that the evidence points both ways, but that it is at least as likely that dream points to ultimate truth as it is that actuality does:

There is no "as if" in dream. The dream is present, real experience, so much so, indeed, that it suggests two questions: What is reality? How do we know that what we dream is unreal and what we experience in our waking life is real? A Chinese poet has expressed this aptly: "I dreamt last night that I was

a butterfly and now I don't know whether I am a man who dreamt he was a butterfly, or perhaps a butterfly who dreams now that he is a man."⁵²

To de la Mare, too, the riddle is probably insoluble, but this leaves him all the more free to choose his own particular path. My aim in the following two chapters will be to discover the ways in which he investigates the supposition that ultimate reality, if indeed it can be known, reveals itself through dream in its various guises, and through man's openness to faith in and experience of the preternatural. I shall at the same time try to suggest how this special area is an essential part of the poetic experience offered to us in the larger part of de la Mare's verse.

The work which could most profitably be discussed as a complement to the prose introduction to Behold, This Dreamer! is "Dreams" (CP, pp. 347-53), the relatively long, final poem from The Fleeting and Other Poems, published in 1933. This poem is more theoretical in its nature than the dream poems to be discussed in Chapter Two. It is not cast in the form of a dream, nor does it present any particular kind of dream as its central subject. Instead, it explains the nature of dream, in the broad sense of the term. In the poem, some of the speaker's own specific dreams are peripherally referred to (st. 30-32, CP, p. 352), and at least one of them (a dream of three moons present simultaneously) correlates directly with one of de la Mare's own sleeping dreams.⁵³ This suggests, along with the fact that the ideas expressed in this poem are echoed throughout his work, that the speaker is closely identified with the poet himself.

As de la Mare writes in Come Hither that "[d]reamers, too, may call themselves travellers",⁵⁴ so this poem begins with an image of travelling to the destination of dream:

Ev'n one who has little travelled in
This world of ample land and sea;
.....
Each day makes measureless journeys twain;
From wake to dream; to wake again.
(st. 1, CP, p. 347)

De la Mare told Sir Russell Brain that, although he had not travelled much, he did not regret it, as the places visited "rarely come up to the expectations which had been created by his imagination".⁵⁵ Linking this statement to one previously quoted regarding his "far more active and adventurous existence" during sleep,⁵⁶ we have further confirmation that de la Mare's centre of interest is not the world of actuality, an aspect of which would be physical travel, but rather dream life. He regards the latter as a different, probably more exciting form of travel, and the two comments referred to above, both suggesting a particularly vivid imagination and fertile dream life, perhaps indicate why, for him, this is so. This leitmotif of dream as a kind of journey, recurring throughout his work, is again evoked in stanza 29 of the poem under discussion. The subject is the source of Shakespeare's inspiration: is it actuality, or is it his "teeming" imagination?

... the tangible and seen? -
This the sole range of his demesne?

Ask not the Dreamer! See him run,
 Listening a shrill and gentle neigh,
 Enchanted foothills far away.
 Somewhere? Nowhere? Who need say?
 So be it in secrecy of his mind
 He some rare delectation find.
 (st. 28-29, CP, p. 352)

The kind of scene evoked is exotic and magical - "Enchanted foothills far away" - and the precise region of experience remains unresolved, but the speaker does not see the necessity for precise knowledge: "Who need say?"

A second important point made in the poem, after the first that dreaming is journeying, is that the realms of exploration extend to the "grotesque" (l. 20), an idea which should help correct any false impression one might have of de la Mare's work as either vapid or saccharine. Although he is drawn to the world of dream, it is not because he has unrealistic views about its being unfailingly pleasant. He depicts first of all the "[r]egions of beauty, wonder, peace / By waking eyes unscanned, unknown" (st. 6, CP, p. 348), as the territory likely to be encountered by the dreamer in his wanderings. But,

in the seventh and eighth stanzas, he dwells on the horror of nightmare by evoking appropriately desolate images of the scenery through which the dreamer is led:

Or lost, betrayed, forlorn, alas!
 Gaunt terror leads him by the hand
 Through demon-infested rank morass;
 O'er wind-bleached wilderness of sand;
 Where cataracts rave; or bleak sea-strand
 Shouts at the night with spouted spume;
 Or locks him to rot in a soundless tomb.
 (st. 6, CP, p. 348)

After the depiction in this stanza of the helpless dreamer being led by "gaunt terror" through nightmare territory, stanza 9 enables him to take refuge in God as comforter. The reference to "God's mercy" occurs within the context of the poet's commenting on the value that even the "nightmare dregs of idiocy" may have for the dreamer. It is these "nightmare dregs" of stanza 8 that form the antecedent of "this" in the first line of the following stanza:

All this in vain? Nay, thus abased,
 Made vile in the dark's incontinence,
 Though even the anguish of death he taste,
 The murderer's woe - his penitence,
 And pangs of the damned experience -
 Will he God's mercy less esteem
 When dayspring prove them only a dream?
 (st. 9, CP, p. 349)

The idea expressed in this stanza, namely that dream may prove to be a valuable educative experience, is referred to by A. C. Spearing in his discussion of one of the rôles that dream was expected to play in medieval poetry:

...The visionary goes to the other world in order to learn something: that is the usual pattern, and it is an important feature of medieval dream-poems. Nothing could be further from the truth than to suppose that medieval people expected a literary dream to provide simply escape from the tedious and no doubt frequently squalid realities of their lives into a more ideal world, an imagined paradise. Medieval religion and courtly culture directed themselves towards ideals, which could be realized in poetic dreams more fully than in the waking reality of earthly life; and the glimpses of such realizations given in dream-poems might well help to sustain the orientation of medieval life towards the ideals themselves. But even apart from this, as we have learned from Macrobius, it was expected

that something could be learned from real dreams, and hence from literary dreams: advice or warnings about the future, or philosophical truths which it would be important to know in waking life. This is a rôle which real dreams have played in many cultures.⁵⁷

Thus, the two expectations that the medieval reader had of dream poetry according to Spearing are, firstly, the realization of ideals probably striven towards by the medieval reader himself, who would then be encouraged in his pursuit of them through reading the poetry, and secondly, the provision of some helpful lesson, of a guiding, prophetic, or philosophical nature. Although both ideas and ideals may have changed since then, there is clearly continuity between the medieval reader's expectations when approaching dream literature, and de la Mare's own assumptions regarding the value of dream as expressed in the stanzas referred to above. The "waters and hills whose loveliness / Past mortal sense, are his alone" (st. 6, CP, p. 348) suggest at least an ideal kind of beauty unattainable to the dreamer in actuality. The ninth stanza, depicting a hypothetical nightmare in which the dreamer feels himself to be a condemned man, suggests that in dreams man can learn what in the world heralded by "dayspring" remains estimable, in this case the value of God's mercy.

In stanzas 12, 13 and 14, de la Mare refers cuttingly to Freudian psychology, as he does in the Introduction to Behold, This Dreamer! It is significant that, in both these prose and poetic formulations regarding the nature of dreams, de la Mare deems it necessary to communicate his disagreement with Freud. In his Introduction he writes:

That a Blatant Beast, with virtues of its own nature, is confined in the cellar known as the Unconscious, of which it is advisable as far as possible to keep the key, is undeniable; there is also a caged bird in the attic, and one of a marvellous song.⁵⁸

De la Mare clearly recognizes the good and evil inherent in man, and never attempts to deny the presence of both in man's dream life. He quotes various sceptical opinions of the Freudian type of analysis, such as that it

... fails to give satisfaction because of its inadequacy. No doubt the dreams fit neatly into a sexual framework, but there are many other frameworks into which they fit with equal ease.⁵⁹

De la Mare's chief objection seems to be that Freudian interpretation is too simplistic and attempts to destroy the mystery which for him is inherent in life as a whole, and in dream life in particular. After considering what he views as the inadequacies of the Freudian analysis, he writes:

The question remains whether the waker is in any degree morally answerable for the open and mortifying antics, or worse, of the dreamer. If we decide merely to delight in our choicest dreams, of any kind, without attempting to derive any 'lesson' from them, the risk is ours. It is the secrets of all hearts that will be opened on the last day - but should they meanwhile remain secret from ourselves? Moreover, if we waive responsibility for the Blatant Beast, then the bird of paradise in the attic is also none of ours.⁶⁰

Not only does this quotation serve to endorse the connection made earlier between Spearing's portrayal of the medieval reader's expectation of a moral lesson to be derived from dream literature, and de la Mare's own attitude to dreaming; it also suggests that de la Mare is prepared to accept responsibility for both facets of his dream life: the reprehensible (and indeed de la Mare had several dreams in which he was a murderer)⁶¹ and the praiseworthy; the ugly and the beautiful; the squalid and the inspiring. His rejection of Freud is thus not a matter of convenience, a shrugging off of personal responsibility, but rather of conviction.

"Dream and Imagination", the extended essay which forms the Introduction to Behold, This Dreamer!, and the source of the comments on Freud cited in the discussion above, was published in 1939. In an earlier work, the poem "Dreams", published in 1933, the tone of de la Mare's references to Freudian psychology is more ironic, and he laments the absence of humour in the Freudian world view, or rather, dream view:

But men of learning little heed
Problems that simple folk perplex;
And some there are who have decreed
Dreams the insidious wiles of sex;

That slumber's plain is wake's complex;
 And, plumbing their own minds, profess
 Them quagmires of unconsciousness.

Sad fate it is, like one who is dead,
 To lie inert the long night through,
 And never by dream's sweet fantasy led
 To lave tired eyes in heavenly dew!
 But worse, - the prey of a gross taboo
 And sport of a Censor - to squat and make
 Pies of a mud forbidd'n the awake!

Nay, is that Prince of the Dust - a man,
 But a tissue of parts, dissectable?
 Lancet, balances, callipers - can
 The least of his actions by human skill
 Be measured as so much Sex, Want, Will? -
 Fables so dull would the sweeter be
 With extract of humour for company!
 (st. 12-14, CP, p. 349)

De la Mare's disapproval is evident, and has various causes. Firstly, he considers the Freudian interpretation removed from common experience, belonging to "men of learning" rather than to "simple folk", and hence probably more ingenious than true. Secondly, he suggests that Freud's theories owe at least something to Freud's personality, for he implicitly accuses such "men of learning" of "plumbing their own minds". Thirdly, however attractive dream life normally appears to be, were the Freudian view of it accurate, it would be a state to which oblivion were preferable. The contrast between this negative view of dream life, as depicted (in de la Mare's opinion) by Freud and his followers, and the poet's usual attitude of approbation is so marked as to indicate grave disapproval of the Freudian interpretation. Finally, the analytical nature of Freudian theory is unappealing to de la Mare, who enjoys the mystery inherent in man when contemplated in his entirety. The cry for humour at the end of stanza 14 suggests that Freudian "fables" could have proved acceptable as entertainment if they were at least amusing, but that they certainly could not be regarded as truth.

Both in the Introduction to Behold, This Dreamer! and in the poem under discussion, de la Mare's tone is sometimes biting, not only hinting at the extent of his disagreement, but also suggesting his personal involvement in

the question at issue. The nostalgic allusion in stanzas 15 and 16 (CP, p. 350) to Hypnos, god of Sleep and father of Dream, and the "votary" who "cast his beauty in bronze", is followed by the ironic comment: "Not ours these foillies."⁶²

Memoirs of a Midget provides a depiction of Hypnos which serves to fill out the reference made here. When Midgetina is striving "to puzzle out life's riddle", she is haunted instead by the face of Hypnos:

Not for the first or the last time did wandering wits cheat me
of the goal, for presently in the quiet of my thoughts, stole
into my imagination the vision of that dreaming head my eyes had
sheltered on.

"Hypnos," I sighed the word....⁶³

She had been drawn to "the serene, winged, sightless face" in the home of Sir Walter Pollacke, who is delighted to find in this "dear young lady ... a fellow fanatic". Sir Walter introduces Hypnos to Midgetina as "'Sleep, you know, the son of Night and brother of Death'", in whose presence "a whisper sounded on and on" in her mind, "'I know more than Apollo, I know more than Apollo'".⁶⁴ The suggestion is that the kind of knowledge that is truly valuable to de la Mare is not necessarily consciously acquired, an idea which will be pursued further on in this discussion. Midgetina is overcome ("every thought evaporated in a sigh") when her kindred spirit, Sir Walter, sends her, "of a delicate veined fairness, ... a minute copy in ivory of none but lovely Hypnos". The gift transports her into "a serenity beyond all hope".⁶⁵ It is not only Sir Walter's Christian name that leads us to suspect a measure of identification with him on the author's part, but also Sir Russell Brain's account of de la Mare's displaying a similar head of Hypnos in his home in Montpelier Row, Twickenham: "I ... went ... up the wide balustraded staircase, from the window-sill of which a head of Hypnos smiled down upon the visitor."⁶⁶

To return to the poem "Dreams": after implicitly rejecting that "the wellspring of genius is hid / In a dark morass that is dubbed the Id" (st. 16, CP, p. 350), de la Mare implies that life, especially that aspect of it which

pertains to dream, is ever-intriguing and mysterious, as he asks unanswerable questions regarding the origins of life and of thought:

Who of his thoughts can reach the source?
 Who in his life-blood's secret share?
 By knowledge, artifice, or force
 Compel the self within declare
 What fiat bade it earthward fare?
 Or proof expound this journey is
 Else than a tissue of fantasies?
 (st. 19, CP, p. 350)

The suggestion, its tentativeness implicit in the form it takes of questions, is that "knowledge, artifice, or force" are inadequate means of arriving at the truth. Similarly, they do not provide a way of distinguishing true reality from appearance, and thus cannot disprove that this earthly life, "this journey", is other than a "tissue of fantasies". Clearly, the speaker's affirmation is not of actuality but of its counterpart as, in the following stanza, he attributes "man's happiest moments" to "[d]aydreams of selfless transiency" (st. 20, CP, p. 350).

De la Mare's numerous references to simple forms of life and the essential expression of each thing, such as the "myriad winnowings" of the fly, and the blackbird's song, indicate an implicit deprecation of learning, that is, of conscious knowledge, in favour of instinct and intuition:

Go bees for nectar to Hume and Kant?

 Does not the rather their life-craft seem
 A tranced obedience to a dream?
 (st. 21-22, CP, p. 351)

The word "dream" is here presumably used in the sense of unconscious knowledge (instinct, intuition), and the suggestion is that it is innate, whereas learning is acquired. On two separate occasions in Tea with Walter de la Mare, the poet is recorded as having referred to the same question in similar terms.

In the first instance, de la Mare and Sir Russell Brain were talking about the building of nests by birds, and speculating on their own incompetence in that area:

He [de la Mare] thought this raised a question about the nature of intelligence. Is not the best intelligence the kind that is bestowed upon us rather than that which we earn by our experience?⁶⁷

The other reference occurs in a circumstance similar to that depicted above and to the context created in the poem "Dreams". A discussion arising from the question of the communication of bees led to de la Mare's asking: "'Don't you think we learn too much? Aren't the things that we know when we come into this world more important than the things we learn here?'" As the third chapter of this thesis will show in greater detail, de la Mare is interested in dream as the possible source of life and children's relative closeness to it. Their innocence is attributed to their not yet being alienated from the source of things by prolonged exposure to actuality and an excessive focus on the unspontaneous aspects of life. The poet alludes to the connection between children and innocent, original dream existence in the final stanza of "Dreams", quoted on p. 36.

Even art and mathematical discovery are indebted to dream in de la Mare's view: "Thus tranced, too, ... / The worker in words, or wood, or stone" (st. 23, CP, p. 351). Mozart is supposed to have composed "in a reverie deep" (st. 24, CP, p. 351), and de la Mare cites the fact of William Hamilton's discovery of the square root of minus one during sleep as further evidence for man's dependence on dream. This discovery is also referred to by the poet at a much later date, 1955, as "an achievement requiring the same qualities as the creative artist possessed".⁶⁹ Towards the end of the poem, the myth of the creation of Eve is attributed to dream: not only does God address Adam in a dream, but Adam consequently "conceive[s]" of Eve while dreaming (st. 34-35, CP, p. 353).

When reflecting on how "frail the instant which must be / Our all of actuality" (st. 26, CP, p. 351), the speaker is led to imagine a situation in which King Solomon is asked the question which pervades, and is implicitly answered in, de la Mare's entire work: "'Where is the real? In dream? Or

wake?'" (st. 27, CP, p. 352). The final stanzas of the poem under discussion provide a partial answer:

O Poesy, of wellspring clear,
 Let no sad Science thee suborn,
 Who art thyself its planisphere!
 All knowledge is foredoomed, forlorn -
 Of inmost truth and wisdom shorn -
 Unless imagination brings
 Its skies wherein to use its wings.

Two worlds have we: without; within;
 But all that sense can mete and span,
 Until it confirmation win
 From heart and soul, is death to man.
 (st. 33-34, CP, p. 353)

A marrying of kinds is suggested here in so far as de la Mare is not denying the value of knowledge as much as condemning it if divorced from imagination. He clearly sees it as dependent on the world "within" if it is to be of real value; that is, if it is to possess "inmost truth and wisdom". Without "confirmation" from the inner, imaginative self, "sad Science", that is empty knowledge, is in fact destructive, "death to man". It is interesting to note that as late as 1955, a year before his death, de la Mare still questioned the distinction between knowledge and science: "Why are two words which mean the same thing used for different things?"⁷⁰ De la Mare may have in mind here the original sense of scientia, a word which meant knowledge and from which the term science was derived.

The penultimate stanza of "Dreams", following the reference in dream terms to the myth of Eden mentioned earlier, reiterates man's need for "the living waters" of the imagination:

Starven with cares, like tares in wheat,
 Wildered with knowledge, chilled with doubt,
 The timeless self in vain must beat
 Against its walls to hasten out
 Whither the living waters fount;
 And - evil and good no more at strife -
 Seek love beneath the tree of life.
 (st. 36, CP, p. 353)

Thus, man's escape from the prison he feels himself to be trapped in is through the imagination. Again, the poet makes a connection between the

imagination, or dream life, and the source of life, pointed to in the phrases, "the living waters" and "the tree of life".

The final stanza contains the speaker's personal commitment to dream, that is, imaginative existence, as a mode of being:

When then in memory I look back
 To childhood's visioned hours I see
 What now my anxious soul doth lack
 Is energy in peace to be
 At one with nature's mystery:
 And Conscience less my mind indicts
 For idle days than dreamless nights.
 (st. 37, CP, p. 353)

This stanza has already been referred to with regard to the theme of children's being closer to the source of life, and hence to the unity of all things, than adults. Again, one notices how radically different from the analytical Freudian approach to life is the one which attracts de la Mare: "in peace to be / At one with nature's mystery". The poem as a whole is an expression of the poet's ideas regarding the nature of dream as an exercise of the creative imagination, man's need for and dependence on the imagination for happiness and vitality, and, finally, the speaker's sense of his personal responsibility to cultivate the interior aspect of life, more naturally expressed, he implies, by children than by adults, and therefore by the latter more rigorously to be pursued.

The thematic concerns emerging from this discussion of "Dreams" would seem to correspond largely with typically Romantic ideas. As a theme, the primacy of the imagination permeates Coleridge and remains an article of faith with the later Romantics; and the idea of the child's closeness to nature and to the origin of things appears frequently in Wordsworth. David Perkins's association of de la Mare with Yeats's phrase "the 'last Romantics,' as Yeats characterized himself and his fellow poets,"⁷¹ thus seems more suitable than applying the term "Georgian" to de la Mare. His interest in dream and the preternatural is rooted in the literary traditions preceding him, and the closest, most relevant one seems to be the Romantic era. As Perkins writes:

"Through his lore of dreams and the unconscious, de la Mare restates the Romantic ... doctrine that the poetic imagination is in touch with realities deeper than reason or consciousness"⁷²

The following extract from "Dreams and Imagination" shows that de la Mare recognizes that it is in the Romantic period that dream becomes a special centre of interest:

... In general, the Elizabethan poets made use of dream - as they used everything else - when and as they needed it. The poets of the eighteenth century, submitting poetry to reason, to invention and to wit, owed far less to dreaming; the Romantic Revival, perhaps too much.⁷³

Despite an implied criticism of Romantic excess, the prevalence of dream in de la Mare and his clear interest in the characteristics of the dream state itself mark him off as an inheritor of this new, Romantic preoccupation.

From Old English times onwards, the dream has featured in English poetry. The great precedent for the use of dream in literature was the Bible, which according to the writer Werner Wolff presents dreams with "different degrees of validity": God-inspired, guiding, prophetic and spiritual; but the more mundane dreams are recognized, and in some cases warned against.⁷⁴ Macrobius's commentary (c. 400 A.D.) on Cicero's Somnium Scipionis was another work well known to medieval writers. His discussion arising from Cicero's dream allegory, recognising five types of dream, would provide them with the sense of having classical precedent for their use of dream in literature,⁷⁵ and is in agreement with the Biblical presentation to the extent of seeing certain dreams as valuable and significant, and others as mere physical accidents, better ignored: a result, for example, of diet. It is the conception of dream as an inspired condition, one particularly favourable to the reception of truths not so clearly apparent in everyday circumstances, that is influential for later poets who make use of dream either as a frame or as subject.

Dream in early English poetry occurs often in the form of a frame rather than as content. With medieval dream poems such as The Romance of the Rose,

for instance, one senses that the interest of the various poets, including that of Chaucer (as translator), is as much in love as in dream; but dream is a suitable convention with which to frame the allegory, while yet reminding readers of ideals, or performing other functions that could be expected from dreams.⁷⁶ Like Piers Plowman, Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress, a seventeenth century example in prose of the use of a dream framework, is without doubt primarily an allegory of a Christian's spiritual pilgrimage, and the form it is given of a dream chiefly a convenience, although we cannot disagree with de la Mare that "such phrases as 'the Wilderness of this World' and 'the City of Destruction' invoke in the mind memories not of actuality but of an evilly haunted sleep".⁷⁷ The atmosphere of dream is thus evoked, but in order to serve the author's didactic, spiritual purpose rather than as an end or interest in itself. The other work de la Mare mentions in this regard is Dante's Divine Comedy, which according to Spearing makes "use of the other-world vision for theological and political polemic" and thus anticipates later works, such as Pearl:

Even in Pearl we can recognise a similar underlying structure: there too a man is carried in spirit to the other world, meets there a dead person whom he knew in this world, and is instructed by that person, from a position of unassailable authority, on an important doctrinal issue ...⁷⁸

The practice of using dream as a framework when the primary purpose is didactic is recognized to be a common one.

However, both Chaucer (in his own writings) and Shakespeare form exceptions to the literary norm of invoking dream primarily for the purpose of a convenient framework. Before giving individual accounts of Chaucer's four medieval dream poems, The Book of the Duchess, The House of Fame, The Parliament of Fowls, and the 'Prologue' to The Legend of Good Women, Spearing writes:

... Chaucer, more than any other dream-poet known to me, was interested in dreams as they really are. The existence of four dream-poems is only part of the evidence for this: he includes dreams and their interpretations in several of his other poems,

and also several elaborate discussions of the significance and validity of dreams. One such is the sceptical statement about the validity of dreams made by Pandarus in book v of Troilus and Criseyde, followed shortly by Cassandra's serious interpretation of one of Troilus's dreams. Another is the comically solemn discussion between Chauntecleer and Pertelote in The Nun's Priest's Tale about the significance of Chauntecleer's dream of the fox. In looking at Chaucer's dream-poems, we shall see again and again that he is making use of his understanding of real dreams, in producing works which are dreamlike, not only in superficial details, but in matters of method and structure.⁷⁹

The major Renaissance figure to interest himself in dreams as such is, of course, Shakespeare. A Midsummer Night's Dream, on which de la Mare wrote an essay,⁸⁰ and The Tempest, from which he frequently quotes,⁸¹ are but two of Shakespeare's plays which come to mind as among the numerous ones revealing an interest in hallucinations, the preternatural, and the possibilities of illusions wrought by sleep. Caliban's famous speech relies for its effectiveness on an image of dream, which reinforces the atmosphere of unearthly beauty and haunting mystery:

Be not afeard; the isle is full of noises,
 Sounds and sweet airs, that give delight, and hurt not.
 Sometimes a thousand twangling instruments
 Will hum about mine ears; and sometime voices,
 That, if I then had wak'd after long sleep,
 Will make me sleep again: and then, in dreaming,
 The clouds methought would open and show riches
 Ready to drop upon me; that, when I wak'd
 I cried to dream again.⁸²

Thus, Chaucer and Shakespeare reveal a positive interest in dreams as dreams (and not simply as convenient forms with which to frame material). As has been indicated, in this they are somewhat unusual and anticipate the Romantics.

During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, although one finds isolated cases where poets make use of dream, as do Milton in Paradise Lost and Pope in The Dunciad, there seems to have been less interest or confidence in dream as literary material. Generally speaking, it is the Romantics to whom we look for a psychological interest in dream states as such and in the relation of these to states of mind appropriate to everyday reality, that is, actuality. This interest is connected, obviously, with their sympathy with the irrational, their inward-looking tendency, and their curiosity regarding the workings of the mind.

The following sonnet by Wordsworth, cited in Behold, This Dreamer!, is an example of the interest of the Romantics, and of de la Mare, in the detailed characteristics of the dream experience itself. The poem is in fact based on a real dream of the poet's, the visionary figure described being that of his daughter.⁸³

I saw the figure of a lovely Maid
 Seated alone beneath a darksome tree,
 Whose fondly-overhanging canopy
 Set off her brightness with a pleasing shade.
 No Spirit was she; that my heart betrayed,
 For she was one I loved exceedingly;
 But while I gazed in tender reverie
 (Or was it sleep that with my Fancy played?)
 The bright corporeal presence - form and face -
 Remaining still distinct grew thin and rare,
 Like sunny mist, - at length the golden hair,
 Shape, limbs, and heavenly features, keeping pace
 Each with the other in a lingering race
 Of dissolution, melted into air.⁸⁴

The speaker expresses interest in the exact kind of dream in which the vision appeared to him: "But while I gazed in tender reverie / (Or was it sleep that with my Fancy played?)". He is concerned to know whether it was a day-dream or a sleeping dream. Likewise, Keats ends his "Ode to a Nightingale" with the perplexing question: "Do I wake or sleep?" In Wordsworth's sonnet, an interest is also taken in the kind of vision the speaker had: "No Spirit was she"; and a detailed account of the disappearance of the vision is offered: "The bright corporeal presence / ... in a lingering race / Of dissolution, melted into air". The dream frame, according to de la Mare "so usual a device in English poetry that we question neither its motive nor its justification",⁸⁵ is thus more than a convenient apparatus for the Romantics. For them, perhaps more than for any other age, dream is a mode of awareness, and hence of expression, in itself deserving of attention.⁸⁶

So far, de la Mare's affinity with the Romantics has been considered in terms of the extent and quality of his interest in dream. This is of course only one small area of interest in terms of what constitutes the complex and disparate movement known as Romanticism, of which the English Romantics form

only one facet. And although qualities of de la Mare's poetry correspond to perhaps more widespread and essential Romantic features, such as the significance attached to the individual's questing sensibility in preference to orthodoxy unquestioningly received, it is to another specific shared concern which it most suits my purpose here to draw attention. This is the position given to the child by certain of the Romantics and, to an even greater extent, by de la Mare. In "Freshness of Sensation", a section of one of his chapters in Natural Supernaturalism, M. H. Abrams cites one of the first German Romantics, Novalis, as saying that "there was freshness and originality in all their [children's] perceptions" and that the "fresh gaze of the child is richer in significance than the presentiment of the most indubitable Seer".⁸⁷ Coleridge's ambition to continue "the feelings of childhood into the powers of manhood" (Abrams's emphasis) is mentioned, too,⁸⁸ and Abrams continues his discussion on the position attributed to the child by Romantic writers by pointing out that "[t]hese Romantic formulations are rooted in Biblical and theological commonplaces", supporting his statement with numerous references to the Old and New Testaments (not least among these Christ's own sayings), and to Saint Augustine and Thomas Traherne. Abrams adds that Wordsworth and Coleridge have in common with Traherne the belief that "custom rather than depravity is the tyrant that holds our innocent senses in bondage".⁸⁹ This view is clearly shared by de la Mare when he laments the adult's excessive exposure to the world of actuality which eventually numbs his awareness of reality, to which dream and the preternatural then provide a means of access.

This brief attempt to classify de la Mare as one of the "last Romantics" rather than a Georgian should not be taken to mean that he has no connections with Georgianism; only that these are not definitive. De la Mare's relationship to the Georgian movement will now be considered at slightly greater length, as it is a less obvious matter than his Romantic affinities.

The adjective "Georgian" relates to the reign of George V. It was first used to describe poetry by Edward Marsh, the editor of the five volumes of Georgian Poetry, who indicates the aim of the anthology in his prefatory note to the first volume: "This collection ... may if it is fortunate help the lovers of poetry to realize that we are at the beginning of another 'Georgian period' which may take rank in due time with the several great poetic ages of the past."⁹⁰ In his review of Georgian Poetry, 1911 - 1912, originally published in the Edinburgh Review of April, 1913, de la Mare begins by quoting from this prefatory note by "E.M.", who believed that English poetry was "again putting on a new strength and beauty".⁹¹ A measure of detachment from the endeavour on the part of de la Mare is hinted at when he describes the characteristics of the poets published in Georgian Poetry, 1911 - 1912: "A wholesome independence is manifest, together with as wholesome an exuberance and bravado. Their faults are the faults of youth."⁹² As Perkins points out in his discussion of this first volume, "It included such veterans as Chesterton, de la Mare, Moore, and Masefield and newer poets such as Brooke, Gibson, and Lawrence"⁹³ In his review, de la Mare concentrates almost exclusively on the younger poets, although he mentions Chesterton's "The Song of Elf".⁹⁴ But, as Georgian Poetry, 1911 - 1912 "presents the work of writers who, either before 1911 had published nothing, or who have since then gained some accession of power" (the last phrase is in fact Marsh's),⁹⁵ the inclusion of de la Mare, whose The Listeners and Other Poems was published in 1912, would not seem inappropriate here. And if we defined the term Georgian as simply pertaining to all those poets published by Marsh, de la Mare's appearance in each of the five volumes of Georgian Poetry would make few more Georgian than he. This would appear a somewhat arbitrary method of categorization, however, as one would then merely be following Marsh and, as James Reeves suggests in the Introduction to his anthology, Georgian Poetry, first published in 1962, "Edward Marsh ... was an amateur of the arts." According to Reeves, "The beginnings of the movement were more or less casual and entirely untheoretical."⁹⁶

But at least in the first three volumes of Georgian Poetry, which selectively covered the years 1911 to 1917, one recognizes that de la Mare's poems are at home among those of Gordon Bottomley, for instance, of whose poetry de la Mare writes as follows: "it transports consciousness out of the tangible world. It is the poetry of magic and strangeness; indefinable, inexplicable"⁹⁷ De la Mare's poetry has links, too, with that of Turner, whose "Romance" opens Georgian Poetry, 1916 - 1917 with the stanza:

When I was but thirteen or so
 I went into a golden land,
 Chimborazo, Cotopaxi
 Took me by the hand.
 (p. 3)

The allure of exotic names and faraway places for a young boy is exactly the kind of theme to appeal to de la Mare and to appear in his work. Both the novel Henry Brocken, first published in 1904, and the introduction to Come Hither depict a literary equivalent in prose of Turner's "Romance". In Henry Brocken, the main character and narrator is lured, through his love of literature, into a Don Quixote type of dream experience, where his aunt's horse, Rosinante, carries him to visit Jane Eyre, now Jane Rochester, and after many more literary adventures, leads him to Poe's Annabel Lee, and finally, to Chaucer's Criseyde. This novel, incidentally, is one of de la Mare's creations which rely on a type of dream frame. The hero says: "It is to be wondered at that in so bleak a wind I could possibly have fallen into reverie. But the habit was rooted deep in me"⁹⁸ One recognises that an experience such as Henry Brocken's demands a frame of fantasy or dream in order to be acceptable, for here literary characters live beyond the pages of the works in which they were originally introduced. Through the use of the dream frame, readers are able to join Henry Brocken in tracing the development of these characters; that is, if they are imaginative travellers themselves.

The introduction to Come Hither, called "The Story of This Book", is an account of the fascination for a young boy of three volumes of poetry written by Mr Nahum Taruone, alias Tarune (the author's full name thus being an

anagram of Human Nature), called Theeothaworldie, a title which is easily decipherable.⁹⁹

Furthermore, the sentiments expressed in Turner's "The Hunter", published in Georgian Poetry, 1916 - 1917 (pp. 9-10), are not dissimilar to those pervading de la Mare's "Arabia", published in Georgian Poetry, 1911 - 1912 (p. 67). The sense of the speaker's dreamy longing for an exotic, far-off place predominates in both poems. "Arabia", after "The Listeners" probably de la Mare's most frequently anthologized poem, reads as follows:

Far are the shades of Arabia,
 Where the Princes ride at noon,
 'Mid the verdurous vales and thickets,
 Under the ghost of the moon;
 And so dark is that vaulted purple
 Flowers in the forest rise
 And toss into blossom 'gainst the phantom stars
 Pale in the noonday skies.

Sweet is the music of Arabia
 In my heart, when out of dreams
 I still in the thin clear mirk of dawn
 Descry her gliding streams;
 Hear her strange lutes on the green banks
 Ring loud with the grief and delight
 Of the dim-silked, dark-haired Musicians
 In the brooding silence of night.

They haunt me - her lutes and her forests;
 No beauty on earth I see
 But shadowed with that dream recalls
 Her loveliness to me;
 Still eyes look coldly upon me,
 Cold voices whisper and say -
 'He is crazed with the spell of Arabia,
 They have stolen his wits away.'
 (CP, p. 121)

The speaker's near-possession by his yearning for Arabia is echoed in "The Hunter", to which the epigraph is: "But there was one land he dared not enter." In this poem the unattainability of Yucatan turns out to be that of dream. As in Henry Brocken, it is the printed word which first captures the speaker's imagination:

I met thee first long, long ago
 Turning a printed page, and I
 Stared at a world I did not know
 And felt my blood like fire flow
 At that strange name of Yucatan.

When the opportunity to realize the "splendid dream of Yucatan" appears to be granted, it cannot be taken:

But sailing I have passed thee by,
 And leaning on the white ship's rail
 Watched thy dim hills till mystery
 Wrapped thy far stillness close to me
 And I have breathed 'tis Yucatan!

'Tis Yucatan, 'tis Yucatan!
 The ship is sailing far away,
 The coast recedes, the dim hills fade,
 A bubble-winding track we've made,
 And thou'rt a Dream [,] O Yucatan!

There is more development of plot in Turner's "The Hunter" (where the speaker seems to be approaching Yucatan but then has to watch how "[t]he coast recedes, the dim hills fade ...") than in de la Mare's "Arabia", but the manner of making an exotic place-name represent an unattainable state of dream is common to both poems and typically Romantic-Georgian. In this respect, both poems hark back to the allure of the foreign and exotic in such Romantics and post-Romantics as Coleridge, Tennyson and Arnold.

The tentative comparisons made above have been provided in an attempt to show the relative appropriateness of de la Mare's appearance in the first three volumes of Marsh's Georgian Poetry. However, the inclusion of de la Mare was less appropriate in the case of the post-war volumes of Georgian Poetry, presenting a selection of poems published during the years 1918 to 1922. This was felt to be so by the poet himself. In The Georgian Revolt, Robert Ross devotes a paragraph to de la Mare's uneasiness on this score:

Walter de la Mare also expressed doubts about his inclusion in both volumes. He permitted his verse to be printed in both Georgian Poetry IV and V, though perhaps more out of friendship than conviction. When approached for a contribution to Georgian Poetry IV in 1919 he reminded Marsh that poetic times had changed: 'I feel ... that I am a rather stale old bird to be chirping in the new nest,' he wrote. In 1922 he not only reiterated his position but also, in his characteristically gentle manner, attempted to give Marsh some sound advice: 'You must shed as you go, if you decide to continue.... To be in 5 would be monstrous So, pray, seriously reconsider this. I am quite certain the critics would welcome some removals. "Old ruts" - can't you hear the echoes?' In both instances, however, Marsh pursued de la Mare, and the poet capitulated gracefully though not without misgivings.¹⁰⁰

De la Mare's own sense of not belonging to this particular group of poets should put us on our guard against too easily classifying him as a Georgian, and indeed, both Perkins's and Ross's different summaries of typical Georgian features do not apply in any significant degree to de la Mare. When Perkins writes about "Georgian 'realism'", he singles out three tendencies, none of which is found at all markedly in de la Mare. The first is "anti-aesthetic activism, the praise of 'manly' vigour and engagement in the life of the world".¹⁰¹ One might expect to find this tendency in the work of some of the young war-poets; but hardly in de la Mare. The second trait is "rebellious provocation, the desire to shock by dwelling on the disagreeable".¹⁰² In the previous chapter in which he deals in detail with de la Mare, Perkins isolates several poems, among them "Drugged",¹⁰³ as examples of an increase of interest on de la Mare's part in "harsher, more realistic themes",¹⁰⁴ but one would be unlikely to argue that de la Mare's work, when viewed as a whole, reveals the stamp of naturalism. The few poems that could fall within a naturalist tradition, featuring "harsher, more realistic" material, form the exception rather than the rule.¹⁰⁵ Perkins's third point in explicating Georgian "realism" is the concentration "on elemental human feeling and experience, with the lingering, primitivist assumption that this may be found especially among the poor".¹⁰⁶ Again, this is not what his readers usually find in de la Mare.

Aware of the difficulties surrounding the use of a term which has often been employed both vaguely and disparagingly, as Reeves also notes (p. xi), Perkins seeks to define "Georgian" more positively in the following way:

It here indicates the non-Modernist English poets who became known just before, during, and after the First World War or who did their best work during this period - Rupert Brooke, Wilfrid Gibson, W. H. Davies, Ralph Hodgson, Edward Thomas, Edmund Blunden, W. J. Turner, John Freeman, J. C. Squire, Edmund Shanks, and also, as war poets, Robert Nichols, Siegfried Sassoon, Isaac Rosenberg, and Wilfred Owen.¹⁰⁷

Thus Perkins does not include de la Mare as a Georgian in the strict sense of the term as he defines it above. In his History of Modern Poetry, de la Mare received earlier treatment as a late Romantic and Edwardian poet.¹⁰⁸

In the final summary of his chapter "The Georgian Poets", in a section entitled "The Georgian Compromise", Perkins depicts the Georgian movement, as a whole, in a way which could be regarded as incorporating de la Mare; but the title of his previous chapter resolves any possible confusion or ambiguity. Of the Georgians he writes:

Like the Edwardians, they reacted against the *fin de siècle*. The poets they looked to for paternal example were the English Romantics, and, among other writers nearer in time, Housman, Hardy, Masefield, Yeats, and Synge. They repudiated the noisier side of Edwardian verse - that, for example, of Chesterton, Kipling, and Noyes - but they continued the Edwardian cultivation of the "agreeable", especially the appreciative treatment of countryside.¹⁰⁹

Tellingly, the previous chapter, in which de la Mare receives detailed treatment, is entitled "Craftsmen of the Beautiful and the Agreeable". By this title Perkins intends to denote not the "major poets of the Edwardian age", nor "the popular ones"; but rather the ones representing "the orthodox taste of the poetry reading public".¹¹⁰ And although in his final analysis, quoted above, he sees the Georgians as having a substantial amount in common with these Edwardian "craftsmen of the beautiful and the agreeable", particularly in their shared Romantic heritage and in their "cultivation of the 'agreeable'", he does not regard the two categories as identical. His classification of de la Mare as belonging to the preceding era is thus surely sensible, and indeed in keeping with the flavour of this poet's work.

Certainly, de la Mare is not among Ross's "young Georgian rebels ... - realists or Vorticists, Futurists or Imagists, Ezra Pound or Rupert Brooke, Richard Aldington or Lascelles Abercrombie", all of whom are said to exemplify in some way or other the three tendencies he sets out as typifying "the pre-war poetic revolt":

... it was a part of the larger twentieth-century revolt against Humanism; in the beginning it was the poetic phase of a widespread revolt against Academism among all the arts; and, specifically in the field of poetry, it was a reaction against the dead hand of the Romantic-Victorian tradition.

In de la Mare one finds no hostile reaction to Humanism, the first of the taboos as set out by Ross. In many ways, he works in the Humanist tradition and reflects its values. The wide range of character types on which de la Mare draws is but one indication of his interest in human beings for their own sake.¹¹² As regards the "revolt against Academism" - that is, the imposition of rules and regulations by a self-elected authoritative body on artistic endeavours - this was generally more the concern of painters than poets. De la Mare had no personal axe to grind on this score; and, in any case, is himself not untraditional. Ross's third point is equally inapplicable to de la Mare: far from feeling the Romantic-Victorian tradition to be a dead weight, he shows the influence of such poets as Blake, Coleridge, Poe and Christina Rossetti. If one accepts Ross's classifications, The Georgian Revolt provides further justification for not regarding de la Mare as a Georgian, in addition to the reasons given by Perkins.

Although this discussion has been an attempt to place de la Mare within his literary context, its intention has not been to suggest that his links with earlier and contemporary English poets detract from the unique and distinctive quality of his own voice. The following two chapters will attempt to show how de la Mare's individuality finds expression especially through his poetry which exhibits those aspects of dream and the preternatural outlined in the earlier stages of this chapter.

NOTES

¹ Walter de la Mare, Introd., Behold, this Dreamer: Of Reverie, Night, Sleep, Dream, Love-Dreams, Nightmare, Death, the Unconscious, the Imagination, Divination, the Artist, and Kindred Subjects (London: Faber, 1939), pp. 3-110; hereafter cited as BTD.

² Walter de la Mare, The Complete Poems of Walter de la Mare (1969; rpt. London: Faber, 1975), pp. 347-53; hereafter cited as CP.

³ Walter de la Mare, Desert Islands and Robinson Crusoe (London: Faber, 1932), p. 36; hereafter cited as DIRC.

⁴ See, for example, "Tennyson", in Pleasures and Speculations (London: Faber, 1940), p. 35; and "The House", in Best Stories of Walter de la Mare (London: Faber, 1942), p. 372; hereafter cited as PS and BS respectively.

⁵ Introd., BTD, p. 3.

⁶ De la Mare uses the term "night-dream" (see p. 21, Introd., BTD); but this is misleading when it refers to sleeping dreams of the day.

⁷ Frederick Greenwood, Imagination in Dreams (Bodley Head), as quoted in de la Mare, BTD, p. 388.

⁸ See, for example, Memoirs of a Midget (1945; rpt. London: Faber, 1949 [1921]), pp. 294 and 348; hereafter cited as MM.

⁹ MM, pp. 81-82.

¹⁰ MM, p. 316.

¹¹ MM, p. 128.

¹² See, for example, Introd., BTD, pp. 12-16.

¹³ "Edward Thomas", in Private View (London: Faber, 1953), p. 120; hereafter cited as PV.

¹⁴ Walter de la Mare, CP, pp. 5-6.

¹⁵ DIRC, pp. 214-15; de la Mare occasionally spells "daydream" without the hyphen, a spelling which I then retain when quoting from him.

¹⁶ Walter de la Mare, Tom Tiddler's Ground : A Book of Poetry for Children (London: Collins, 1932), p. 63.

¹⁷ Introd., BTD, p. 99.

¹⁸ Walter de la Mare, Come Hither (1923; rpt. London: Constable, 1941), p. 499; hereafter cited as CH.

¹⁹ Introd., BTD, p. 58

²⁰ Introd., BTD, p. 57.

²¹ Walter Jackson Bate, Coleridge (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1969), p. 66.

²² "Naturalists", in PS, pp. 63-65; in quotations from de la Mare, his spelling of the term "praeternatural" or "preternatural", as the case may be, will be retained.

²³ "Naturalists", in PS, p. 62.

²⁴ Doris Ross McCrosson, Walter de la Mare (New York: Twayne, 1966), pp. 145-46.

²⁵ Walter de la Mare, Stories from the Bible (1947; rpt. London: Faber, 1958 [1929]), p. 7; hereafter cited as SB.

²⁶ SB, p. 12.

²⁷ See, for example, "A Ballad of Christmas" (CP, pp. 319-20 - for a discussion of this poem, see pp. 76-77 below); "The Spectacle" (CP, pp. 461-62); "The Scarecrow" (CP, p. 463); "The Unrent Pattern" (CP, p. 500); "Reunion" (CP, p. 622).

²⁸ Walter de la Mare, "Some Fairy Tales", rev. of With Nature's Children and The Quest of the White Merle, by Lilian Gask; The Gateway of Romance, by Emily Underdown; etc., TLS, 16 Dec. 1909, pp. 500-01.

²⁹ George Eliot, Silas Marner: The Weaver of Raveloe, ed. Q.D. Leavis (1861; rpt. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1967), p. 105.

^{29a} See pp. 132-35 below.

³⁰ Introd., BTD, p. 61.

³¹ Walter de la Mare, The Return (1910; rpt. London: Faber, 1945), p. 166.

32 Walter de la Mare, "Seaton's Aunt", in BS, pp. 74-108.

33 Walter de la Mare, "The Green Room", in On the Edge: Short Stories (London: Faber, 1922), pp. 194-237; hereafter cited as OE.

34 "The Green Room", OE, p. 198.

35 "The Green Room", OE, pp. 229-30.

36 Katharine Briggs, Preface, A Dictionary of Fairies: Hobgoblins, Brownies, Bogies and Other Supernatural Creatures (1976; rpt. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1979), p. xv.

37 Walter de la Mare, "The 'Dream'", in PS, p. 281; on the occasions when de la Mare spells "Faërie" with an umlaut, I retain this spelling when quoting from him.

38 Walter de la Mare, "The Little People", rev. of The Fairies - Here and Now, by S. R. Littlewood, TLS, 25 Sept. 1913, p. 396.

39 See p. 19 above.

40 Introd., BTD, p. 26.

41 Russell Brain, Tea with Walter de la Mare, (London: Faber, 1957), p. 26.

42 Introd., BTD, p. 3.

43 Introd., BTD, pp. 88-89.

44 Alice Meynell, Essays (Burns Oates and Washbourne), as quoted in de la Mare, BTD, p. 390.

45 Introd., BTD, p. 93.

46 Walter de la Mare, Love (London: Faber, 1943), pp. 109-12.

47 Introd., BTD, pp. 92-93. The passage should read: "' ... I've dreamt in my life dreams that have stayed with me ever after, and changed my ideas; they've gone through and through me, like wine through water, and altered the colour of my mind ... '" (Emily Brontë, Wuthering Heights, ed. Hilda Marsden and Ian Jack [Oxford: Clarendon, 1976], p. 99). De la Mare allows himself some licence in quoting, sometimes adapting the original, and sometimes seeming to rely on his memory. The name "Cathie" is his version of the "Cathy" of the novel.

- 48 Introd., BTD, p. 105.
- 49 Introd., BTD, p. 107.
- 50 Introd., BTD, p. 108.
- 51 Introd., BTD, pp. 108-09.
- 52 Erich Fromm, The Forgotten Language (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1951), p. 5.
- 53 Brain, p. 77.
- 54 CH, p. 499, quoted above, p. 7.
- 55 Brain, p. 22.
- 56 Introd., BTD, p. 93, quoted above, p. 21.
- 57 A. C. Spearing, Medieval Dream-Poetry (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1976), p.18.
- 58 Introd., BTD, pp. 81-82.
- 59 Neil Montgomery, Introd., The End of Fear, by Denis Saurat (Faber), as quoted in de la Mare, Introd., BTD, p. 81.
- 60 Introd., BTD, p. 85.
- 61 See, for two examples, Brain, p. 72.
- 62 The allusion is presumably to the creation by an anonymous artist in late Classical times of the head of Hypnos in bronze. The British Museum owns a Roman copy in bronze of the head of a Greek statue of Hypnos. It is dated at 350-300 B.C., and was found at Civitella d'Arno near Perugia. British Museum Replicas (London: British Museum Publications, 1979), p. 19.
- 63 MM, p. 154.
- 64 MM, pp. 151-52.
- 65 MM, p. 173.
- 66 Brain, pp. 20-21.
- 67 Brain, p. 66.
- 68 Brain, p. 78.
- 69 Brain, p. 76.
- 70 Brain, p. 96.

71 David Perkins, A History of Modern Poetry: From the 1890's to the High Modernist Mode (London: Harvard Univ. Belknap Press, 1976), p. 180. The final stanza of Yeats's "Coole Park and Ballylee, 1931" begins with the following two lines: "We were the last romantics - chose for theme / Traditional sanctity and loveliness ..."; The Collected Poems of W. B. Yeats, 2nd ed. (London: Macmillan, 1950), p. 276.

72 Perkins, p. 186.

73 Introd., BTD, p. 97.

74 Werner Wolff, The "Dream" - Mirror of Conscience (New York: Grune and Stratton, 1952), pp. 13-15.

75 C. S. Lewis, The Discarded Image: An Introduction to Medieval and Renaissance Literature (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1967), pp. 23-28 and 60-69; Robert P. Miller, ed., Chaucer: Sources and Backgrounds (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1977), pp. 44-52 and 96-105.

76 See the passage quoted from Spearing on pp. 28-29 above.

77 Introd., BTD, p. 99.

78 Spearing, pp. 14-15.

79 Spearing, p. 49.

80 "The 'Dream'", in PS, pp. 270-305.

81 See, for examples, BTD, pp. 367 and 489.

82 The Tempest, in Complete Works, ed. W. J. Craig (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1943), III.ii. 147-55.

83 William Wordsworth, The Poems, ed. John O. Hayden (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977), II, 1011.

84 BTD, p. 242.

85 Introd., BTD, p. 98.

86 The Romantics often revived the dream vision in the form of an odal poem, celebrating some kind of trance or waking dream vision. Examples of such poems would be Coleridge's "Kubla Khan", anthologized by de la Mare in BTD, pp. 324-26, with Coleridge's full introductory note describing the origin of the poem; and Shelley's "The Question", cited in BTD, pp. 328-29.

87 M. H. Abrams, Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature (New York: Norton, 1973), p. 380.

88 Coleridge, Biographia Literaria, ed. George Watson (1965; rpt. London: Dent, 1975), I, 49, quoted in Abrams, p. 381.

89 Abrams, pp. 381-84.

90 Georgian Poetry, 1911 - 1912, ed. Edward Marsh (London: The Poetry Bookshop, 1912); Georgian Poetry, 1913 - 1915, ed. E. Marsh (London: The Poetry Bookshop, 1915); Georgian Poetry, 1916 - 1917, E. Marsh (London: The Poetry Bookshop, 1917); Georgian Poetry, 1918 - 1919, ed. E. Marsh (London: The Poetry Bookshop, 1919); Georgian Poetry, 1920 - 1922, ed. E. Marsh (London: The Poetry Bookshop, 1922).

91 Edward Marsh, quoted in de la Mare, "Georgian Poetry", PV, p. 123.

92 Walter de la Mare, "Georgian Poetry", PV, p. 125.

93 Perkins, p. 205.

94 De la Mare, "Georgian Poetry", PV, p. 126.

95 De la Mare, "Georgian Poetry", PV, p. 123.

96 James Reeves, ed., Introd., Georgian Poetry (1962; rpt. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968), p. xii.

97 De la Mare, "Georgian Poetry", PV, p. 133.

98 Henry Brocken: His Travels and Adventures in the Rich, Strange, Scarce-Imaginable Regions of Romance (London: Faber, 1942 [1904]), p. 19.

99 CH, pp. vii-xxxviii.

100 Robert H. Ross, The Georgian Revolt: Rise and Fall of a Poetic Ideal: 1910-22 (London: Faber, 1967), p. 226.

101 Perkins, p. 213.

102 Perkins, p. 214

103 See pp. 6-7 above.

104 Perkins, p. 189.

105 See, for example, "The Marionettes" (CP, pp. 209-10); "In the Dock" (CP, p. 234); "The Slum Child" (CP, pp. 283-85); "The Outcasts" (CP, pp. 475-76); "Out of a Dream" (CP, p. 495).

106 Perkins, p. 214.

107 Perkins, p. 204.

108 Perkins, pp. 179-91.

109 Perkins, p. 226.

110 Perkins, p. 165.

111 Ross, p. 45.

112 See, for example, de la Mare's poems presenting portraits of Shakespearian characters (CP, pp. 53-60); and also: "Old Ben" (CP, p. 102); "Miss Loo" (CP, p. 103); "'Sooeep!'" (CP, pp. 162-63); "The Old Soldier" (CP, p. 167); "The Old Sailor" (CP, p. 403); "Sambo" (CP, p. 404); "The Blind Boy" (CP, p. 469); "The Mourner" (CP, p. 618).

Chapter Two

D R E A M P O E T R Y

The aim of this chapter is to demonstrate, through close reference to individual poems, how de la Mare uses dream and the preternatural to present his view of reality. Dream and the preternatural both partly constitute true reality, as seen by de la Mare (and as discussed in Chapter One),¹ and operate, especially the mode of dream, as a means of conveying other aspects of de la Mare's world view. One of his primary values is love, and among his favourite themes are death, time, solitude, and the self. The poems chosen for discussion belong to the various categories set out in Chapter One. The various modes of dream are found, firstly, in poems which are presented in a dream framework; and secondly, where one of the four kinds of dream forms the content, namely, sleeping dream, nightmare, reverie or day-dream, and finally, vision. The three aspects of the preternatural to be considered are the rôle of Christianity, the question of ghosts, and the realm of Faerie. During the discussions of the poems, attention will be drawn to the ways in which these various modes of perception are interwoven with de la Mare's other chief areas of concern. The choice of poems will depend firstly on their representative value, that is, on how typical of de la Mare they are; secondly, on the extent to which an aspect of dream or the preternatural is central to the poem; and, finally, on the level of interaction taking place between dream or the preternatural and other concerns, such as death, or love. Predictably, dream and the preternatural are used by the poet for comment not only on love, death, time, and so on, but also on each other. Dream, especially, is often the ideal medium for conveying details of the preternatural world. Poems in which this occurs will be particularly noticed. Towards the end of this chapter, de la Mare's longest poem, Winged Chariot (published in 1951), will receive special attention as it presents an amalgam of de la Mare's various emphases, as set out above. The discussion of most poems which conform to the patterns outlined above but at the same time have the child as subject will be postponed to Chapter Three.

Naturally, there is a variety of ways in which dream operates in de la Mare's poetry. Although these different ways are not always clearly distinguishable, for the sake of simplicity and clarity, three will be specified. Firstly, there are poems in which dream is presented as a topic of reflection, for meditation, as in "The Imagination's Pride" (CP, pp. 243-44) and "Dreams" (CP, pp. 347-53), discussed in Chapter One.² Dream in these poems is the subject in the way that any poem discussing an issue, in a more or less theoretical way, turns that issue into its subject. Secondly - and this use of dream will form the topic of discussion in the ensuing section of this chapter - dream is the subject of poems which explore the nature of dreams in a more practical, concrete way than the one previously mentioned. These poems focus the reader's attention on dream by being themselves representations of dream states of various kinds, such as reverie or nightmare, for instance. Thirdly, dream may operate as a filter through which to present aspects of what constitutes de la Mare's total vision of life. This important function of dream will be discussed in the final section of this chapter, where the intention is to show how dream is an important factor both in forming and in presenting de la Mare's world view.

The first group of poems under discussion are those cast in the frame of a dream. The medieval and post-medieval traditions of allegorical poems written in this form have been mentioned in Chapter One, and attention was drawn to the fact that the Romantics and, following them, de la Mare, were interested in dream for its own sake rather than employing it as frame primarily for purposes of convenience.³ It is noteworthy that in several of de la Mare's poems which are cast in a dream form his interest in dream itself emerges in various ways. One way for this interest to emerge is in the sudden surprise occasionally given the reader when he realizes that what he has just read was in fact a dream. Unlike most medieval dream poems, in which the dream convention is explicitly and unmistakably established at the outset, a poem by de la Mare holds the reader in suspense, just as the dreamer himself is

held in suspense. Consequently, we believe in the dream as something other than dream until we are suddenly made aware of the form of the poem; in this we are not unlike the dreamer who only on waking discovers that this experience took place in the realm of dream rather than actuality, and is relieved, or saddened, accordingly.

"The Three Strangers", published in 1918 in Motley and Other Poems, is an example of such a poem. The reader is startled into awareness of the speaker's dreaming condition. The speaker only communicates more than half-way through the poem that the experience he is recounting took place in dream:

Far are those tranquil hills,
Dyed with fair evening's rose;
On urgent, secret errand bent,
A traveller goes.

Approach him strangers three,
Barefooted, cowed; their eyes
Scan the lone, hastening solitary
With dumb surmise.

One instant in close speech
With them he doth confer:
God-spiced, he hasteneth on,
That anxious traveller...

I was that man - in a dream:
And each world's night in vain
I patient wait on sleep to unveil
Those vivid hills again.

Would that they three could know
How yet burns on in me
Love - from one lost in Paradise -
For their grave courtesy.
(CP, p. 213)

The dramatic immediacy of the incident is heightened by the use of the present tense, the inverted syntax at the beginning of the second stanza ("Approach him strangers three"), and the diction used of the traveller, evoking an impression of haste and urgency: "urgent, secret errand bent"; "hastening"; "hasteneth"; "anxious". The vividness and intensity with which the meeting is portrayed finds its explanation in the fourth stanza: "I was that man - in a dream". The positive value of the dream experience, and its lingering

effect, are shown by the speaker's longing to communicate to his unknown well-wishers, three angels perhaps, his gratitude "[f]or their grave courtesy". It seems easier for the reader to share in the speaker's experience (as though it were his own) when he is initially unaware that the speaker's encounter with the three strangers occurred within a dream; and his discovery of the dream frame presumably parallels the speaker's own discovery on waking.

Two other poems in which the dream frame is not specified at the outset are "The Dreamer" (CP, pp. 206-07) and "Break of Morning" (CP, pp. 328-29), but because of the title of the first and the subject of the second (the Day of Judgment), the revelation that the content of the poem is dream experience, or the outcome of dream experience, is not altogether unexpected.

Perhaps the most striking poem of all written according to this formula, namely, that which entitles the reader to the knowledge that an experience takes place within the precincts of dream and sleep only after the experience itself has been conveyed, is "The Visitant" (CP, p. 465). This poem is sufficiently short and powerful to be quoted in its entirety:

A little boy leaned down his head
 Upon his mother's knee;
 'Tell me the old, old tale', he said,
 'You told last night to me.'

It was in dream. For when at dawn
 She woke, and raised her head,
 Still haunted her sad face forlorn
 The beauty of the dead.

The title of this poem, "The Visitant", could have alerted the reader to its preternatural element, but it seems to me that the opening stanza of the poem is likely to be taken literally. The reader would then expect the narrative thread of the poem to lead on to the presentation of some extraneous "visitant": there seems nothing ethereal about the little boy who "leaned down his head / Upon his mother's knee". The poignancy of the second stanza and the nostalgia implicit in it are thus all the more powerful after the

seemingly concrete depiction of affection between mother and son. But there is a hint that this dream was more than dream, that is, that it contained a very real element of the preternatural. For after the mother wakes; "Still haunted her sad face forlorn / The beauty of the dead." As was suggested in the introductory paragraph of this chapter, dream is here seen to be an ideal vehicle through which the preternatural may reveal itself. This idea ties in with the discussion in Chapter One drawing attention to de la Mare's primary interest as being essentially in a "further reality", of which both dream and the preternatural may be expressions.⁴ In "The Visitant", we see the one, namely dream, providing an opportunity, or frame, for the expression of the other, the preternatural.

A dream-framed poem in which attention is drawn to the otherness of the world of dream as opposed to that of actuality is "The Assignment" (CP, pp. 371-72). The background to the speaker's dream experience is specified to be illness in the second stanza, and the speaker then proceeds to distinguish the regions of fantasy from those of actuality:

Felled with such sickness I had lain that life
 Nightmare's phantasmagoria seemed to be.
 Alas, poor body, racked with woe and strife,
 Its very weakness set my spirit free.

Wondrous the regions then through which I strayed,
 Spectre invisible as the wind and air,
 Regions that midnight fantasy had made,
 And clear cold consciousness can seldom share.

Yet even here the boundary becomes indistinct as illness is felt to transform actuality into "nightmare's phantasmagoria". The rest of the poem depicts a particular dream experience, in which the speaker encounters a humble white horse, and concludes:

Strange is man's soul, which solace thus can win,
 When the poor body lies at woe's extreme -
 Yea, even where the shades of death begin -
 In secret symbol, and painted by a dream!

The poem thus ends on a reflective note, affirming the value of dream, in this case of a consolatory nature. It does so, however, only after explicitly

casting the poem in a dream mode and presenting the contents of the dream vision in some detail. Thus it explores the nature of dream both in a reflective and practical way.

As several of the poems which have been considered above are not merely framed in a dream but at the same time present sleeping dreams as content, it seems necessary to examine only one poem which is explicitly about a sleeping dream.⁵ A particularly powerful one is presented in "An Island" (CP, p. 462). As in "The Assigination", the dreamer in "The Island" is ill, and the blessedness of the vision is thus all the more unexpected and welcome. Dream is here used as a vehicle of anticipation of what death may bring. The significance of such a dream to a man sufficiently ill to have a nurse waiting on him, and who, by his own admission, is "on the grave's cold brink", is self-evident. It may be a good omen of the joy awaiting him:

Parched, panting, he awoke; phantasmal light
 Blueing the hollows of his fevered eyes;
 And strove to tell of what he had dreamed that night -
 In stumbling words its meaning to devise: -

An island, lit with beauty, like a flower
 In sea of sapphire fringed with ocean's snow,
 Whose music and beauty with the changing hour
 Seemed from some inward source to ebb and flow;
 A heart, all innocence and innately wise,
 Well-spring of very love appeared to be -
 'A candle whose flame', he stammered, 'never dies,
 But feeds on light itself perpetually.
 Me! This! A thing corrupt on the grave's cold brink,
 And into outer darkness soon to sink.'

The tired nurse yawned. 'A strange dream that!' she said.
 'But now you are awake. And see, it's day.'
 She smoothed the pillow for his sweat-dark head,
 Smiled, frowned; 'There, sleep again!' - and turned away.

The total lack of comprehension and interest on the nurse's part, with which the dreamer's account of his overwhelmingly powerful, beautiful and moving dream is greeted, serves to heighten the reader's sense of the intensity of the experience for the dreamer, by sheer force of the contrast between the tone of the second stanza and that of the final one, opening: "The tired nurse yawned." Her apathy, boredom and fatigue highlight the intense

involvement of the dreamer in his experience. The adjectives "parched" and "panting", which probably refer to the dreamer's illness, simultaneously convey the impression of fevered urgency. The phrase "phantasmal light / Blueing the hollows of his fevered eyes" suggests the otherworldliness of the region whence he has returned; and the phrases "stumbling words" and "he stammered" suggest his urgent wish to hold on to his dream, and not to let it slip elusively from him. The dream content could hardly be more idyllic. The island is incomparably beautiful: "lit with beauty, like a flower / Its sea of sapphire fringed with ocean's snow". Music emanates from it; and finally, it is "[a] heart, all innocence and innately wise, / Well-spring of very love...". Thus, it is spiritually all that could ever be considered good and blessed. The direct speech of the dreamer conveys his sense of wonderment: "... Me! This!... " He is clearly referring to his frail state of health: "A thing corrupt on the grave's cold brink"; and yet the setting side by side of "Me!" with "This!" is suggestive, and hints possibly at the speaker's identification with the "candle whose flame ... never dies, / But feeds on itself perpetually". Are the dreamer and the reader perhaps both led to doubt that it is "into outer darkness" that he will sink? May it not rather be into "light itself"? The imagery is too pointed to be missed, and the dream becomes strongly suggestive of the after life.

Clearly, this poem is then an example, too, of the interweaving of themes which frequently takes place in de la Mare's poetry. His interest in dream, death, what lies beyond, and possibilities of spiritual realms of beauty, love and blessedness all emerge, and merge, here. The difference shown between the attitude of the dreamer himself, who is alight with the wondrousness of his experience, and of the pragmatic nurse, who reveals only apathy, points to the distinction made by de la Mare between those who are imaginatively receptive and those who close themselves, as far as possible, to experiences of dream and the preternatural, a type which is epitomized by Sheila Lawford, the unsympathetic wife in The Return, and which never meets with de la Mare's approbation.

Although several of the poems mentioned above contain nightmarish elements,⁶ there are not very many poems in de la Mare's work explicitly featuring nightmare; and one of the characteristics of those that do so seems usually to be the relief, or comfort, or positive value to be extracted from the experience with which the dreamer is met on awakening. God's mercy often seems to play a part at this point. The long poem "Dreams" (CP, pp. 347-53), for instance, discussed in Chapter One,⁷ presents a nightmare in which the dreamer even experiences "pangs of the damned", having tasted "the anguish of death... / The murderer's woe - his penitence". His waking experience is described as follows:

Will he God's mercy less esteem
When dayspring prove them only a dream?

What bliss to clutch, when thus beset,
The folded linen of his sheet;
Or hear, without, more welcome yet,
A footfall in the dawnlit street;
The whist of the wind; or, far and sweet,
Some small bird's daybreak rhapsody,
That bids him put all figments by.
(st. 9-10, CP, p. 349)

The joy the dreamer takes in the ordinary details of daily life is vividly depicted, after his continued appreciation (in the light of day) of God's forgiveness of repentant sinners has been suggested in the preceding stanza.

An interesting poem in this regard is "Out of a Dream" (CP, p. 495), as it provides a dramatic depiction of a terrifying nightmare in its first stanza, and in its second - and final - one presents a solacing vision of Christ. The contrast is particularly striking:

Out of a dream I came -
Woeful with sinister shapes,
Hollow sockets aflame,
The mouth that gapes
With cries, unheard, of the dark;
The bleak, black night of the soul;
Sweating, I lay in my bed,
Sick of the wake for a goal.

have strayed". The summary given in the rest of stanza one reveals that the reverie represents "an ultimate future that yet / Was the dust of a past". The actual reverie begins on the speaker's entering what is presumably an imaginary house:

The door was ajar when I entered. And lo!
 A banquet prepared for one loved, long ago.
 But I shunned to peer close, to detect what was there,
 As I stood, lost in reverie, facing that chair.
 In anguish and dread I dared not surmise
 What fate had befallen those once ardent eyes,
 The all-welcoming hands, the compassionate breast,
 And the heart now at rest,
 Ev'n from love now at rest.

(st. 2, CP, p. 493)

His "anguish and dread" at having to confront death echo the epigraph: "The very soul within my breast ...' / 'Mute, motionless, aghast ... '"

The change in the face of the speaker's beloved, which once was a "[g]entle palace of loveliness", is presented subtly and indirectly. It is only the words "now void", with reference to her eye-sockets, which suggest her present skeletal state. The speaker thus preserves a certain delicacy with regard to her, even in the raw confrontation with death (st. 3, CP, p. 493). The gruesome aspect of death is laboured instead with regard to the house, where "Decay was ... Regent of Night. / It clotted the fabric of curtain and chair / Like a luminous mildew infesting the air" (st. 4, CP, p. 493); almost every word labouring the distasteful aspects of physical disintegration.

The fifth stanza presents the confrontation of the speaker by himself:

And I?
 And I? Ghost of ghost, unhouse'l'd, foredone -
 Candle, fleet, fire - out of memory gone.
 Appalled, I peered on in the glass at the face
 Of a creature of dread, lost in time, lost in space,
 Pilgrim, waif, outcast, abandoned, alone,
 In a sepulchred dark, mute as stone.

(st. 5, CP, p. 494)

The level of reality at this point in the poem is ambivalent. Is the "glass" a looking-glass which exists in actuality; is it perhaps "the familiar disguised as the strange" in the context of the reverie; or is it in fact a totally imaginary object, a furnishing of the house, and so a part of the fictional setting of the adventure? It seems most probably the last, as the speaker proceeds to describe the realm of his experience as a "region of Nought" and the images as ones "conjured by thought". Again, as in the opening lines of the poem, the state of reverie is implicitly being defined:

Yet of beauty, past speech, was this region of Nought
 And the reflex of images conjured by thought -
 Those phantoms of flow'rs in their pitcher of glass
 Shrined a light that no vision could ever surpass.
 (st. 5, CP, p. 494)

The poet here suggests that a reverie need not be a more pallid form of consciousness than a vision, which is perhaps the ordinary expectation; but rather that it may produce moments of parallel intensity: "a light that no vision could ever surpass". The speaker proceeds to communicate his sense of "an intricate web of significancy", woven by "every leaf, twig and tree";

And those hills in the moonlight, a somnolent green,
 Still awakened a yearning to scan the unseen,
 To seek haven within the unseen.
 (st. 5, CP, p. 494)

One's impression is thus that the dreamer is an emotionally active participant in his dream experience; longing, and searching. In many of the dream poems previously discussed, there has been instead a sense of passivity, helplessness, or even imprisonment on the dreamer's part. The dreamer's being awake rather than asleep and his consequently increased awareness at least partially explain the higher degree of involvement of will and emotion in reverie. It is suggested by the poet in "Outer Darkness" that the imaginative experience in this case is certainly more voluntary than in the case of one who is a victim of a grueling nightmare occurring during sleep, for instance.

It has already been established that day-dreams form a subsection of reverie,¹⁰ and the poem to be discussed as representative of this is "A Daydream" (CP, pp. 545-46). The first stanza effectively sets the scene: it frames the poem as a day-dream; it presents the substance of the dream ("Seraphs ... / Blew a music water-sweet"); and, finally, it even indicates that day-dreaming is but a form of reverie:

In a daydream, all alone,
Shone another sun on me,
Where, on cliffs of age-cold stone,
Harebell, thyme and euphrasy,
Seraphs came that to the air
Blew a music water-sweet;
And, as I watched, in reverie,
Danced with flowerlike soundless feet.

The first stanza alone indicates that "A Daydream" is a hybrid poem of the categories featuring dream frames and the Christian aspect of the preternatural. The material is presented within a dream frame but the mention of seraphs, traditionally part of a celestial hierarchy, link it to the Christian aspect of the preternatural; while its title invites us to view it primarily as a day-dream.

The second stanza evokes the joy and tranquillity radiating from the seraphs' playing of their instruments:

But in leaden slavery
Lay my limbs, and I forlorn
Could but watch till faint and wan
Waned their beauty, and was gone.

So the speaker's physical state forms a marked contrast to the content of his dream. He does not provide reasons for his "leaden" condition, but it anticipates his sorrow at the seraphs' disappearance. As is often the case in de la Mare's dream poems, the dreamer is left wondering, questioning, after his experience, not understanding fully its significance or the origin of its strangeness, or even its otherworldliness, as in this case:

O my heart, what eyes were these?
What viols theirs, that haunt me so? -
.....
O too happy dreams that furl
Their day-fearing petals white;
And vanish out of sight!

De la Mare thus closes his poem on an image of dreams as flowers, transitory, evanescent and evasive. Yet one does not feel that the unanswerability of the questions with which the dreamer is left in any way detracts from the experience itself; instead it heightens the sense of mystery.

"'Said Flores'" (CP, pp. 487-88) is perhaps only part day-dream, thus more safely categorised under the broader heading of reverie. It appears to be a girl's magical fantasy, addressed perhaps to her lover, containing elements of day-dream in presenting impossible wishes; but its ending (the final two stanzas) suggests the more brooding, pensive, melancholy characteristics of reverie:

'If I had a drop of attar
And a clot of wizard clay,
Birds we would be with wings of light
And fly to Cathay.

'If I had the reed called Ozmadoom,
And skill to cut pen,
I'd float a music into the air -
You'd listen, and then ...

'If that small moon were mine for lamp,
I would look, I would see
The silent thoughts, like silver fish,
You are thinking of me.

'There is nothing upon grass or ground,
In the mountains or the skies,
But my heart faints in longing for,
And the tears drop from my eyes.

'And if I ceased from pining -
What buds were left to blow?
Where the wild swan? Where the wood-dove?
Where then should I go?'

The evocative, magical qualities of this poem typify perhaps one of the most salient, attractive features of de la Mare's poetry, namely its haunting beauty. The mystery, the open-endedness, the unanswerable questions: all serve to evoke in the reader a yearning which echoes the speaker's own. Simultaneously, through the music of the poetry itself, as well as through the strange loveliness of the images of the dream presented, a sense of beauty is aroused in the reader. The dream form clearly provides de la Mare with the

structure he needs to express his vision; a vision which captures the mystery and magic of life, and is hence by its very nature elusive and communicable only by means of dream-like images.

The final dream category to be illustrated is that of vision, which provides an opportunity to consider The Traveller (CP, pp. 501-16), in length superseded only by Winged Chariot, to be discussed at the end of this chapter. This complex and enigmatic poem forms the subject of Victoria Sackville-West's Warton lecture on English poetry. But she never examines what appears to me to be both the crux and climax of the poem, namely the vision in which it culminates, the Traveller's final experience before death.

The Traveller is a covertly, rather than explicitly, allegorical poem. The Traveller is on a journey which leads him to a "huge void ...; / Months of slow journeying from the haunts of men" (st. 13, CP, p. 502). The reader is implicitly encouraged to relate exterior journeys through rocky landscapes to those of the mind, soul and imagination. In stanza 11, the parallel is explicitly drawn between the external and interior worlds, and in the twelfth stanza the Traveller's questioning of himself suggests a blurring of the borderline between the worlds of dream and actuality:

So flows experience: the vast Without;
Its microcosm, of the Soul, within;
Whereof the day-distracted eye may doubt,
But doubts no more as soon as dreams begin.

Thus mused this Traveller. Was he man or ghost?
Deranged by solitude? Or rapt away
To some unpeopled limbo of the lost -
Feint that the light of morning would betray? ...
(st. 11-12, CP, p. 502)

Victoria Sackville-West, in whose comments there is perhaps an unnecessary degradation of those who use allegory explicitly, writes that de la Mare "is, of course, far too fine and subtle an artist ever to insist on an allegorical moral, and indeed it is possible that he drew the suggestion up from his subconscious self, in which he is avowedly a believer".¹¹ And de la Mare's tentativeness is evident in the stanzas quoted above. But here, as elsewhere

in his poetry, dreams themselves seem to provide him with the evidence he requires for viewing dreaming as a form of travelling¹² and, as the title of the poem (the appellation of the central character) suggests, the Traveller is also a dreamer, a soul-searcher, a pilgrim of the imagination, on a quest for Truth and Reality.

Halfway through the poem, the Traveller has a sleeping dream which, like several of de la Mare's other dream-framed poems, features a version of the after life, or Judgment Day. These visions seem generally speculative in nature, and seldom conform to Christian orthodoxy.¹³ The vision presented here is, in shortened form, the following:

He dreamed the transitory host of men,
Debased by pride, lust, greed and self-esteem,
Had gone their way; that Earth was freed again.

.....

Nature, released from this vile incubus,
Had wooed into being creatures of other kind,
Resembling those long since deemed fabulous,
As exquisite in aspect as in mind.

.....

To Judgement had been called the Sons of Light,
The stellar host, the Sun and all his brood:
Rank beyond rank, height above heavenly height,
Within the eternal peace of God they stood,

Hymning his glory. And, alas, he knew
That, chosen envoy of the Earth, he had come,
Garbed in her beauty, and enraptured too;
But, though he had yearned for joy, his soul was dumb.

And by unuttered edict exiled thence,
He had fallen, as Satan fell, in leaden dismay,
And thus had wakened to the rock-land whence
His spirit, in fantasy, had winged away ...
(st. 44, 46, 51-53, CP, p. 506)

This dream of being cast out of Paradise bears some resemblance to the Traveller's visionary experiences recounted later on in the poem, but these do not altogether lack an affirmative aspect, whereas the dream cited above holds out no hope to the dreamer at all.

After being pursued by "the spectre, Fear" (st. 73, CP, p. 509) and consequently "in a moment aged ... many years" (st. 79, CP, p. 509), the Traveller and his horse are presumably by "God's mercy give[n] means for flight" (st. 76, CP, p. 509) and finally allowed to rest, but with "[n]ought but the love between them left to graze" (st. 80, CP, p. 509). Despite the Traveller's conviction that he and his beloved Arab mare have only "one more night to live" (st. 83, CP, p. 510), the poem now moves into its most positive phase, in the sense of depicting an experience of serenity, tranquillity, even bliss.

The enemy Fear, "a shapeless shape of horror" (st. 75, CP, p. 509), having been overcome, the Traveller seems to be rewarded by what follows. As night darkens, "It seemed an inward voice had summoned him" (st. 88, CP, p. 510), and this is what he perceives:

Not reflex moon-ray, but a phantom light,
Like hovering, pervasive reverie
Of Mind supreme, illumining the night.

Rapt in this loveliness, his spellbound face,
To travail the while, and famine, reconciled,
Of fret and weariness shed every trace,
As sleep brings comfort to a tired-out child:

Sleep to a body so pure and exquisite
Like manna it is, at gilding sunrise seen;
The senses so untrammelled that as yet
No more than frailest barrier lies between

Soul and reality. Thus beauty may
Pierce through the mists that worldly commerce brings,
Imagination's blindness wash away,
And - bird at daybreak - lend the spirit wings.
(st. 91-94, CP, p. 511)

The Traveller here seems very close to his ultimate goal, namely that of perceiving the nature of truth. As he receives "this boon of benison and peace", causing him to shed tears now "not of grief but bliss" (st. 96, CP, p. 511), the Traveller is confronted by a disturbing and at the same time revealing sight:

The hushed and visionary host of those
Who, like himself, had faced life's long duress,

In pangs and horrors, anguish, hardship, woes,
Their one incentive ever on to press ...

.....
Strange beauty theirs, this host - in rapt array,
Spectral and motionless, intent, and dumb,
Laved in light's loveliness they stretched away
Homage ironic to his Kingdom Come!
(st. 98, 106, CP, pp. 511-12)

This potentially devastating vision of his imaginative peers who, like him, are driven on by "that secret craving of the soul / For what no name has" (st. 99-100, CP, p. 512), all of whom are hailed by the "Angel of Failure ... with rhapsody" (st. 100, CP, p. 512), has an unexpected effect. Instead of feeling lost and forlorn, the Traveller appears to himself rather as a "child of genius":

- one
Who explores pure fantasy's unbounded realm;
And being at length confronted by ordeal
No human consciousness could comprehend,
A preternatural ecstasy can feel -
Life's kiss of rapture at life's journey's end.
(st. 107-08, CP, pp. 512-13)

The reward of extending the imagination to its utmost bounds is thus depicted as both intense and exquisite, and perhaps even worth the perils of the venture.

After a sleep, the second one (the poet hints) to provide the Traveller with sylph-like visitants,¹⁴ he becomes aware of his own activity, the mere "rustle of his raiment" (st. 115, CP, p. 513), as a possible "desecration of the quietude":

... as if there dreamed
A presence here where none had dared intrude

Since waters from waters had divided been,
World from the heavens, the land from ocean freed ...
(st. 115-16, CP, p. 513)

The lines cited above suggest that the Traveller is approaching closer to perceiving the nature of God Himself (in this poem not specifically the Christian God). And, finally, the Traveller does have such a total experience. Its intensity is such that surviving it seems to be an impossibility.

The experience begins with the Traveller's humbling himself by pouring "hoarsely forth a babble of praise and prayer" (st. 129, CP, p. 515). Victoria Sackville-West mentions this prayer as "an affirmation of faith", but she stops short of examining what to my mind is the most crucial episode in the poem, namely the Traveller's final vision. This most intense, dramatic and shattering of all the Traveller's experiences is what one could perhaps call his vision of God:

A self there is that listens in the heart
To what is past the range of human speech,
Which yet has urgent tidings to impart -
The all-but-uttered, and yet out of reach.

Beneath him an immeasurable well
Of lustrous crystal motionlessly black
Deeped on. And as he gazed - marvel past words to tell -
It seemed to him a presence there gazed back:

Rapt, immaterial, remote; ev'n less
In substance than is image of the mind;
And yet, in all-embracing consciousness
Of its own inmost being; elsewise blind:

Past human understanding to conceive;
Of virgin innocence, yet source of all
That matter had the power to achieve
Ere Man created was, ere Adam's fall.
(st. 130-33, CP, p. 515)

In Exodus 33.20, the Lord says to Moses: Thou canst not see my face: for there shall no man see me, and live. One possibility is that de la Mare is here imaginatively pursuing the logical consequence of that idea.

The Traveller perceives himself in the midst of this vision as "a mote scarce visible" (st. 134, CP, p. 515), and is finally annihilated:

It seemed his heart was broken; his whole life long
Concentrated in this moment of desire;
Its woe, its rapture, transient as the song
The Phoenix sings upon her funeral pyre.

'Alas', he gasped - his journey now at end;
Breathed softly out his last of many sighs;
Flung forth his hands, and motionless remained,
Drenched through with day, and darkness in his eyes ...
(st. 136-37, CP, p. 516)

The Traveller's beloved Arab mare, which (it appears) he thought would die before or with him,¹⁵ has outlived him, and finally leaves him, in a frenzy of panic and terror. The final stanza of the poem, the only one containing five lines instead of four, is comforting but inconclusive:

Sweet is that Earth, though sorrow and woe it have,
 Though parched, at length, the milk, within its breast;
 And then the night-tide of the all-welcoming grave
 For those who weary, and a respite crave:
 Inn at the cross roads, and the traveller's rest ...
 (st. 143, CP, p. 516)

It is perhaps significant that this final additional line reads: "Inn at the cross roads, and the traveller's rest ...", the uncapitalized "t" in "traveller" suggesting the universal aspect of death. The last line presents an analogy for the "all-welcoming grave", or rather two related analogies: the homely inn providing the weary pilgrim with rest. Thus the unknown is made welcome and familiar. At the same time, however, the expansion of the stanza from four to five lines (an unprecedented variation in the poem) introduces a note of the strange while the ellipsis at the end of the lines creates some sense of the inconclusive. But given the meaning, the rhyme scheme abaab ensures quite a strong sense of closure; and furthermore, what began as an alternate rhyme pattern (aba) is converted into an enfolding one (baab), which helps create a sense of calm and finality, and yet sustains an elegiac tone.

Having looked fairly closely at one or more examples of poems illustrating the various dream categories, I shall continue by discussing the three aspects of the preternatural world as they find their expression in de la Mare's poetry, namely his relation to Christianity, his interest in the question of ghosts, and the pervasive influence of the world of Faerie. Occasionally a preternatural subject is introduced into a poem by means of a dream frame, which seems particularly appropriate, as the realm of possibilities is thus extended far beyond the world of actuality. Very often, no dream frame is provided, and such poems seem to epitomize dream poetry, as the presence of

the qualities of faith and imagination, as noticed in Chapter One, is in such cases assumed¹⁶ - if not on the part of the reader, at least on the part of the speaker or character(s) in the poem perceiving whichever aspect of the preternatural world it happens to be.

Several dream-framed poems by de la Mare indirectly pertain to the Christian element in his work by presenting semi-paradisaical experiences. One example of this is "A Daydream" (CP, pp. 545-46), discussed earlier, in which the speaker is visited by music-making, dancing seraphs.¹⁷ Another, revealing at the same time de la Mare's interest in the nature of the after life, is the apocalyptic "Break of Morning" (CP, pp. 328-29).¹⁸ The Creation myth is presented from a child's perspective in "A Dream" (CP, p. 387); a celestial vision is featured in "Known of Old" (CP, p. 449); the dreamer is spiritually blessed in "An Interlude" (CP, pp. 390-91). My discussion here will be confined to poems which are not presented in a dream frame. One such is "A Ballad of Christmas" (CP, pp. 319-20), its title already indicating that it is not altogether unframed, but that its frame derives purely from literary convention and is not also dependent on what is associated with the dreaming condition.

"A Ballad of Christmas" was first published as a separate poem in an edition of one hundred copies in 1924,¹⁹ and thereafter in The Fleeting and Other Poems in 1933. The traditional ballad metre and an even closer than traditional ballad rhyme, in this instance abab, at first appears to herald the old and traditional Christmas story of the visit of the three wise men to the newborn babe, Christ the King:

It was about the deep of night,
And still was earth and sky,
When in the moonlight, dazzling bright,
Three ghosts came riding by.

It is only in the fifth and sixth stanzas that the reader is fully alerted to the fact that these three travellers seem to be on a quest of a different kind from that of the magi, and are in fact literal ghosts:

Oh, but their hearts with woe distraught
 Hailed not the wane of night,
 Only for Jesu still they sought
 To wash them clean and white.

For bloody was each hand, and dark
 With death each orbless eye; -
 It was three Traitors mute and stark
 Came riding silent by.

The traitor on the left is Pilate, he "upon the right" Herod;

And he, these twain betwixt, that rode
 Was clad as white as wool,
 Dyed in the Mercy of his God,
 White was he crown to sole.

Throned mid a myriad Saints in bliss
 Rise shall the Babe of Heaven
 To shine on these three ghosts, i-wis,
 Smit through with sorrows seven;

Babe of the Blessed Trinity
 Shall smile their steeds to see:
 Herod and Pilate riding by,
 And Judas, one of three.

The epiphany of the final line imitates the dramatic nature of the forgiveness of Christ. It is interesting that de la Mare takes this quality of mercy, which orthodoxy attributes to Christ to a limitless degree, and extends its exercise to an extent which transcends the bounds of justice set by orthodoxy. The forgiveness of Judas shows Christ's mercy operating in the most ultimate way conceivable. One witnesses in this poem the poet's faith acting in conjunction with his imagination, as he extends the Christmas story to its furthest limits. The ballad metre and the almost consistently tight rhyme scheme heighten the dramatic quality of the poem and the reader's sense of mounting tension, which culminates in the final line, containing the revelation of the identity of the third ghost-traveller, Judas.

Several poems by de la Mare are tentatively religious rather than overtly Christian; they reveal the preternatural edge which even the familiar has for de la Mare. A poem which exemplifies this tendency is "The Spectacle" (CP, pp. 461-62). The contrast between heaven and hell is brought down to earth in this poem:

Scan with calm bloodshot eyes the world around us,
 Its broken stones, its sorrows! No voice could tell
 The toll of the innocent crucified, weeping and wailing,
 In this region of torment ineffable, flame and derision -
 What wonder if we believe no longer in Hell?

And Heaven? That daybreak vision?
 In the peace of our hearts we learn beyond shadow of doubting
 That our dream of this vanished kingdom lies sleeping within us;
 Its gates are the light we have seen in the hush of the morning ...

We see that the orthodox religious dichotomy between hell and heaven is viewed in human terms here, rather than divine. But the call "on us poor mortals to put our praise into words" referred to in the second stanza hints at the divine significance of earthly beauty. The ultimate human achievement appears to be the following:

If; as our love creates beauty, we exult in that transient radiance,
 This is the garden of paradise which in our folly
 We abandoned long ages gone.

The reference to the garden of Eden operates as a kind of leitmotif recurring throughout de la Mare's poetry.²⁰ In sentiment, the lines quoted above also echo the twentieth stanza of "Dreams":

See, now, this butterfly, its wing
 A dazzling play of patterned hues;
 Far from the radiance of Spring,
 From every faltering flower it choose
 'Twill dip to sip autumnal dews:
 So flit man's happiest moments by,
 Daydreams of selfless transiency.
 (st.20, CP, p. 350)²¹

Man's earthly bliss or "Heaven" thus consists for de la Mare in fully appreciating life's love and beauty, while accepting its transiency. The final stanza of "The Spectacle", the title of which refers to the scene of "the world around us", suggests a relation between the divine and man's earthly existence:

Though, then, the wondrous divine were ev'n nebulae-distant,
 The little we make of our all is our earthly heaven.
 Else we are celled in a darkness,
 Windowless, doorless, alone.

Hell is thus being "celled in a darkness, / Windowless, doorless, alone". This theme is echoed in "Reunion" (CP, p. 522), of which the final two lines read as follows: "Hell is the heart that nought divine can share, / And all else verges towards paradise."

"The Tomtit" (CP, p. 470), published in 1945 in The Burning-Glass and Other Poems, perhaps epitomises the tentative aspect of de la Mare's religious beliefs. The speaker relies on this homely, familiar little bird to evoke in him the most profound sentiments, so that his religious sense in fact expresses itself not in response to "direct divinity" but rather to the haunting effect on his soul of this "eager little mystery", the tomtit:

What ancient code, what Morse knew he -
 This eager little mystery -
 That, as I watched, from lamp-lit room,
 Called on some inmate of my heart to come
 Out of its shadows - filled me then
 With love, delight, grief, pining, pain,
 Scarce less than had he angel been?

.....

Well, it were best for such as I
 To shun direct divinity;
 Yet not stay heedless when I heard
 The tip-tap nothings of a tiny bird.

The second stanza (with which the quotation above begins) shows the mindfulness, that is, lack of "heedless[ness]", of the speaker as he responds to the sounds made by the tomtit, so that he has in fact proved the significance he finds in these so-called "tip-tap nothings".

De la Mare's religion is thus primarily an inward sense of divinity, of the holiness of the ordinary, of the transcendental significance of the familiar, which he is always perceiving in new and mysterious ways. Blake's words, "To see a World in a Grain of Sand, / And a Heaven in a Wild Flower, / Hold Infinity in the Palm of your Hand, / And Eternity in an hour" represent de la Mare's attitude too. Few of his poems are as explicit in their endorsement of Christianity as "The Burning-Glass" (CP, pp. 463-64),²² and even it rejects a "map" and "history" in favour of "[a]nother language ..., /

A hidden evangelist", which speaks in the "inmost heart". "A Ballad of Christmas" turns out to be less orthodox than one initially supposes, and "The Tomtit" evokes an intense, almost religious response to the natural rather than to the ostensibly, or obviously, preternatural. De la Mare's sense of the divine thus extends to incorporate an inner receptivity to the holiness of the seemingly ordinary and familiar.

The second aspect of the preternatural to be concentrated on in this study is the interest in the question of ghosts revealed by de la Mare in his poetry, as indeed in his novels and short stories, to which reference has already been made in Chapter One.²³ As there is a particular emphasis on ghosts in de la Mare's work, some generalizations regarding the use of ghosts in his poetry seem required, as it is possible to discuss only a very small proportion of the total number of poems on this subject. Ghost poems are presented occasionally from the point of view of the ghost,²⁴ at other times from the perspective of the recipient of the ghostly experience,²⁵ and finally, it is occasionally an impersonal voice presenting the situation.²⁶ Among the poet's preoccupations regarding the issue of ghosts is the level of reality to be attributed to any experience of ghostly manifestations, that is, whether it is to be regarded as illusory or as true. In the discussion of individual poems which follows, this issue will receive particular attention.

Another interesting perspective from which to view some of de la Mare's ghost poems is found by examining the extent to which the ghost is welcomed by the one visited. Often the situation depicted consists of an encounter between two lovers, the one still living, the other now in the region of the dead. Several poems depict the outcome of unhappy love: occasionally it results in suicide, and the roaming ghost then often bears the former beloved only ill will.²⁷ At other times, the one who is still alive is overjoyed at a visit from the beloved and attempts to cling to the experience desperately, pathetically.²⁸ Occasionally, the recipient's response changes during the course of a poem.²⁹ It is significant how frequently the attitude towards

ghosts which is presented by the poet is a positive one. Even the poems which are reflective in nature rather than presenting experiences of ghostly manifestations seem largely affirmative in their estimation of ghostly presences.³⁰ Of course, one does find in de la Mare the occasional poem depicting a certain fearfulness vis-à-vis ghostly phenomena, and at times a certain scepticism; but in the latter case, the sceptic is usually in conversation with a devotee.³²

Motley and Other Poems, published in 1918, contains four poems on the subject of ghosts. One of these, "The Ghost" (CP, pp. 196-97), reminiscent of Hardy in its use of dialogue and its wistful tone, presents in its first three stanzas a dialogue between a character and his former beloved, thereby suggesting the concrete nature of the encounter:

'Who knocks?' 'I, who was beautiful,
Beyond all dreams to restore,
I, from the roots of the dark thorn am hither.
And knock on the door.'

'Who speaks?' 'I - once was my speech
Sweet as the bird's on the air,
When echo lurks by the waters to heed;
'Tis I speak thee fair.'

'Dark is the hour!' 'Ay, and cold.'
'Lone is my house.' 'Ah, but mine?'
'Sight, touch, lips, eyes yearned in vain.'
'Long dead these to thine ...'

Silence. Still faint on the porch
Brake the flames of the stars.
In gloom groped a hope-wearied hand
Over keys, bolts, and bars.

A face peered. All the grey night
In chaos of vacancy shone;
Nought but vast sorrow was there -
The sweet cheat gone.

The increased interaction in the third stanza (where each character speaks three times instead of only once, as in the two preceding stanzas) suddenly gives way to a sense of anticlimax and pathos in the fourth stanza. After presenting the reader with a fait accompli as concrete as a conversation

quoted verbatim, the poet casts the level of the experience into doubt. The words "Silence" and "groped a hope-wearied hand" suggest disappointment, even point to the beginning of disillusionment; the "chaos of vacancy" indicates a negative sense of emptiness that is more precise; and the presentation of the first speaker's sense of loss culminates in the final line, "The sweet cheat gone." The conclusion here suggests that this ghostly manifestation could have been in the nature of an illusion, leaving the recipient of the experience feeling cheated and anew bereft, or that the ghost came but went away again before it could be seen (or, perhaps could never be seen, though heard). The poem thus highlights the ambiguities surrounding such experiences: we can never be sure of the extent of their subjectivity.

"The Voice" (CP, p. 233) is another wistful poem, comparable to "The Ghost" in depicting contact, or attempted contact, between ghost and lover:

'We are not often alone, we two,'
Mused a secret voice in my ear,

.....

Like remembered words once heard in a room
Wherein death kept far-away tryst;
'Not often alone, we two; but thou,
How sorely missed!'

The sorrow involved in losing a loved one is clearly a theme which is dear to de la Mare. The reaching out of the one left alive to the other beyond death is a subject which de la Mare often presents, but in a wholesome way - longing for contact is the major impetus, not a morbid preoccupation with the corruption of the flesh, or life in the grave. "Who's That?" (CP, p. 236) is an evocative poem showing the appeal the world beyond death may hold for one still of the earth, even when the "cheat is clear":

Who's that? Who's that? ...
Oh, only a leaf on the stone,
And the sigh of the air in the fire.
Yet it seemed, as I sat,
Came company - not my own;
Stood there, with ardent gaze over dark, bowed shoulder thrown,
Till the dwindling flames leaped higher,
And showed fantasy flown.

Yet though the cheat is clear -
 From transient illusion grown;
 In the vague of my mind those eyes
 Still haunt me. One stands so near
 I could take his hand, and be gone: -
 No more in this house of dreams to sojourn aloof, alone:
 Could sigh, with full heart, and arise,
 And choke, 'Lead on!'

The power of illusion is evident in this poem. The illusory nature of the experience is known even to the dreamer: "Yet though the cheat is clear - / From transient illusion grown; / ... / I could take his hand, and be gone". Despite the dreamer's consciousness of the nature of his experience, he views earthly life as "this house of dreams", and the world beyond death is seen by implication to present a more vital reality. Ghostly company, as often in de la Mare, is welcome.

"The Remonstrance" (CP, p. 200), as its title suggests, is more vigorous than most of the poems mentioned above. There is no question here of the ghost-visitor's being a "cheat" - the experience has too unsettling an effect on the recipient for that explanation to appear credible:

I was at peace until you came
 And set a careless mind aflame.
 I lived in quiet; cold, content;
 All longing in safe banishment,
 Until your ghostly lips and eyes
 Made wisdom unwise.

This speaker claims that "[q]uite forgot / Lay the sweet solitude we two / In childhood used to wander through". Perhaps they were childhood sweethearts; in any case, "Time's cold had closed my heart about; / And shut you out." The first two stanzas are thus spent almost resenting the interference of the ghostly presence in this atmosphere of cold, calm indifference; but in the remainder of the poem, there is a passionate and absolute surrender on the part of the speaker to the power in his life of this new yet familiar presence:

Well, and what then? ... O vision grave,
 Take all the little all I have!
 Strip me of what in voiceless thought
 Life's kept of life, unhop'd, unsought! -
 Reverie and dream that memory must
 Hide deep in dust!

This only I say: - Though cold and bare
 The haunted house you have chosen to share,
 Still 'neath its walls the moonbeam goes
 And trembles on the untended rose;
 Still o'er its broken roof-tree rise
 The starry arches of the skies;
 And in your lightest word shall be
 The thunder of an ebbing sea.

The exclamations uttered in the third stanza, "Take all the little all I have!" and "Strip me of what ... / Life's kept of life ...!", reveal the ardour of the speaker's surrender to this ghostly vision. It is significant that the speaker's view of the ghostly manifestation as a "vision grave" does not result in a sceptical response, but in its opposite: in an unconditional yielding of himself, his thoughts, and his life, to this being, or vision: "in your lightest word shall be / The thunder of an ebbing sea."

In both "Vigil" (CP, p. 205), also from Motley and Other Poems, and "The Spectre" (CP, pp. 232-33), from The Veil and Other Poems, we find a pleading for the return of the beloved; but in the former case the ghost does not seem to be present, is certainly not responsive; and in the latter, the ghost, who is clearly present, is depicted as "unmoved".

Only a few of de la Mare's many ghost poems have been discussed above, but it is hoped that the footnoted references to others have provided sufficient endorsement of the generalizations made earlier. More discussion of poems dealing with ghosts will appear in the thematic section of this chapter, especially in connection with solitude and love, as the motif of ghosts in de la Mare's poetry is interwoven with his especial interest in these two themes.

The final aspect of the preternatural to be dealt with is de la Mare's presentation of the world of Faerie in his poetry. Of the three facets of the preternatural here set out, this one is the furthest removed from actuality in being the least usual of the three, presumably, to claim the adherence of an educated, sophisticated adult in the modern world. De la Mare's implied personal commitment has been remarked on in Chapter One;³³ his particular presentation of fairy beings will be explored here. As many of his fairy

poems bear relation to his perspective on children, this aspect of de la Mare's poetry will be further considered in Chapter Three. Here, though, are some generalizations pertaining to his use of fairy beings in his poetry.

In accordance with tradition as recorded in the work of a folklorist like Katharine Briggs,³⁴ de la Mare presents fairy beings of diverse moralities: some are viewed as good, others as evil or wicked, and still others as ambivalent in nature. They are usually depicted as fascinating, but their characters are not idealised. His presentation of land fairies, as of supernatural water creatures (such as naiads, mermaids, sirens), suggests the potential for both good and evil, and the other characteristics attributed to them (such as dancing in the case of the fairies, and alluring qualities in that of the water nymphs) also conform to tradition. It is thus not so much in the kind of detail with which they are presented that de la Mare is unconventional as in the prominence he gives them in his work. They clearly do not feature in his poetry merely as a literary convention, nor do they appear only in his poems for children; it is from his oeuvre as a whole that the peculiar fascination of these creatures for him emerges.

Two fairy poems which contrast in their suggestion of good and evil are "Berries" (CP, pp. 154-55) and "The Mocking Fairy" (CP, p. 177). The first of these comes from de la Mare's delightful and well known collection for children called Peacock Pie: A Book of Rhymes, published in 1913. The subject of "Berries" is the adventure of an old woman out blackberry picking who is aided by a good fairy. This fairy, clearly representing the force of good, instructs Jill, the old woman, where to pick:

'Be off,' says the Fairy,
 'As quick as you can,
 Over the meadows
 To the little green lane,
 That dips to the hayfields
 Of Farmer Grimes:
 I've berried those hedges
 A score of times;
 Bushel on bushel
 I'll promise 'ee, Jill,
 This side of supper

If 'ee pick with a will.'
 She glints very bright,
 And speaks her fair;
 Then lo, and behold!
 She had faded in air.

True to the fairy's promise, Jill fills her basket to such an extent that on her return she is "[s]o tired with her basket / She scarce could creep". Although picked near Father Grimes's land, the berries are described by the impersonal speaker as "the dark clear fruit / That from Faërie came", thus the berries are linked to the preternatural not only in Jill's discovery of them but also in their origin. Jill's own acknowledgement is her hiding a "gallipot", "one little teeny one, / One inch high;"

And that she's hidden
 A good thumb deep,
 Half way over
 From Wicking to Weep.

In folk tradition, the offering of food to fairies is a way of paying tribute to good fairies (or of attempting to appease evil ones!). Here the motive on Jill's part is undoubtedly, gratitude.

"The Mocking Fairy" (CP, p. 177), also from Peacock Pie, portrays a fairy with a very different kind of character from the one depicted in "Berries". There are perhaps even dark hints that this fairy, who seems to be exulting in the unresponsiveness of Mrs Gill, may have a share in the cause of her quietness. Has Mrs Gill been charmed dead by this fairy, perhaps?

'Won't you look out of your window, Mrs. Gill?'
 Quoth the Fairy, nidding, nodding in the garden;
 'Can't you look out of your window, Mrs. Gill?'
 Quoth the Fairy, laughing softly in the garden;
 But the air was still, and the cherry boughs were still,
 And the ivy-tod neath the empty sill,
 And never from her window looked out Mrs. Gill
 On the fairy shrilly mocking in the garden.

'What have they done with you, you poor Mrs. Gill?'
 Quoth the Fairy brightly glancing in the garden;
 'Where have they hidden you, you poor old Mrs. Gill?'
 Quoth the Fairy dancing lightly in the garden;
 But night's faint veil now wrapped the hill,
 Stark 'neath the stars stood the dead-still Mill,
 And out of her cold cottage never answered Mrs. Gill
 The Fairy mimbling, mambling in the garden.

The use of neologisms such as "nidding", "mimbling" and "mambling" to describe the activities of the fairy heightens the atmosphere of mystery surrounding the seemingly unusual quietness of Mrs Gill. One can only speculate as to the former relationship between the fairy and the lady who is possibly her victim, if indeed there was a relationship at all. At least it seems clear that the fairy is revelling in the downfall of Mrs Gill. Whether this is because Mrs Gill offended her, or simply because the fairy is by nature evil, or both, is not evident. But the fairy's exultation certainly is evident. In l. 4 she is described as "laughing in the garden"; in the second stanza as "brightly glancing in the garden" and then as "dancing lightly in the garden". The mention of her "nidding, nodding" and "mimbling, mambling in the garden" also adds to one's impression of the fairy's certainly mischievous and perhaps rather ill-intentioned activities. Her "shrilly mocking in the garden" referred to at the end of stanza one unambivalently presents her as malignant and gloating. Mrs Gill's own state of being remains enigmatic: the hints of death are implicit only in de la Mare's presentation of the environment. The atmosphere of stillness is emphasized in the first stanza, with the parallel phrasing of l. 5 enhancing the sense of stasis: "the air was still, the cherry boughs were still". It is the three lines immediately preceding the final one that contain the strongest suggestions of death. The connotations of words and phrases such as "night's faint veil now wrapped the hill", "[s]tark", "dead-still", "out of her cold cottage never answered Mrs. Gill", load the atmosphere with a deathly hush and sinister overtones, all associated with the mystery - to the reader at least, if not to the fairy - of Mrs Gill's quietness. The fairy's familiar appellations, "you poor Mrs. Gill" and "you poor old Mrs. Gill", could suggest mere high spirits or audacity, but they could also indicate a preceding relationship, and not one of goodwill, between the fairy and her victim, which it seems to be very subtly suggested Mrs Gill is. In Crossings: A Fairy Play, one sees that (as in tradition) mortals need not even offend to be used as the plaything of determined fairies - they

kidnap Anne for her beauty and imagination. Have they spirited Mrs Gill away to the realm of Faerie for some dark purpose of their own, so that she seems dead to earthly eyes, or does her death provide them with some other secret gratification? "'What have they done to you ...?' and 'Where have they hidden you ...?'" could suggest a knowledge on the fairy's part of rather malicious actions on the part of fellow conspirators, or it could point to genuine ignorance as to what has become of Mrs Gill. Indubitably, this poem is both mysterious and sinister. It raises many questions and answers few. Most interesting for our purposes is its presentation of a fairy who, whether with or without a cause, does not appear to bear a particular human any goodwill. The fairy herself is depicted as a fascinating being, but one who may be dangerous. The title, "The Mocking Fairy", suggests the aura which surrounds the fairy and which she continues to exude. But de la Mare's depiction is a complex one.

The poem immediately following "The Mocking Fairy" in Peacock Pie is called "The Honey Robbers" (CP, pp. 178-79), and presents two fairies, Gimmul and Mel, predictably, in accordance with the title of the poem, indulging in the relatively innocuous crime of stealing from a hive. Katharine Briggs points out that fairies, "like all wild creatures, [feel] themselves to have a right to any human possessions, especially food",³⁵ so that this activity does not necessarily suggest possession of an evil nature. What is particularly interesting is the conclusion of the poem. After describing the procedure of these two fairies' robbery of "Earth Man's honey", in the process mentioning their physical attributes of "elf-locked hair and scarlet lips", de la Mare concludes:

And when this Gimmul and this Mel
 Had munched and sucked and swilled their fill,
 Or ever Man's first cock should crow
 Back to their Faërie Mounds they'd go.
 Edging across the twilight air,
 Thieves of a guise remotely fair.

The earthly realm inhabited by man, to which fairies when they choose can gain access, is sharply distinguished from Faerie, the land belonging exclusively to its preternatural inhabitants. Its remoteness is implicit in the final phrase qualifying its inhabitants: "Thieves of a guise remotely fair." And we can never penetrate beyond the "guise" to the underlying reality of these unearthly beings.

Another impudent, mocking fairy is depicted in the short poem "Never" (CP, p. 443), also published in a collection essentially written with an audience of children in mind, namely Bells and Grass: A Book of Rhymes (1941). It reveals both the unreliability of fairies judged by human values, and their essential remoteness and unattainability to human beings:

'Take me, or leave me - I'm not thine,'
The fairy mocked on the sands of Lyne -

Frail as Phosphor over the sea:
'Seven long years shalt thou toil for me.'

Full seven I laboured, teen and tine:
But - 'Take me, or leave me, I'm not thine!'

The human speaker's honest dedication and hard labour are to no avail. The fairy's independence cannot be violated, and she clearly suffers no pangs of conscience at the trick she has played on this gullible human being.

There is evidence of de la Mare's fascination with the matter of Faerie throughout his work. For a very close, detailed portrait of a specific kind of fairy, one may turn to the exquisitely delicate poem called "The Fairy in Winter" (CP, pp. 230-31), and for a description of "a company of elf-folk" to "The Unfinished Dream" (CP, pp. 246-47), as its title suggests, a poem in which dream is again used as a vehicle for conveying aspects of the preternatural world. Both these poems were published in The Veil and Other Poems (1921). The activity of dancing and the less innocent one of exchanging human babies for fairy ones will be examined in Chapter Three which considers the child as dreamer, as the more interesting of these poems are presented from a child's perspective, or written primarily for children.³⁶

What remains to be noticed here is the particular appeal which the beautiful feminine fairy beings who dwell in watery places hold for de la Mare. Among these are mermaids, nereids, naiads, sirens, sea-maids. Some of his poems on these subjects are among his most evocative. It is perhaps the mystery and dangerous allure of these beings that evoke some of de la Mare's finest and most haunting lyrical qualities. One example would be "Sam" from Peacock Pie (CP, pp. 165-66), a poem which continues to echo in the mind of the reader long after it is read. The situation it depicts is that of an old man telling a younger one, the speaker, perhaps a child, of his encounter with a mermaid a long time ago. It is through his simply expressed yet mysterious images that the haunting effect is created:

When Sam goes back in memory,
 It is to where the sea
 Breaks on the shingle, emerald-green
 In white foam endlessly;
 He says - with small brown eye on mine -
 'I used to keep awake,
 And lean from my window in the moon,
 Watching those billows break.
 And half a million tiny hands,
 And eyes, like sparks of frost,
 Would dance and come tumbling into the moon,
 On every breaker tossed.
 And all across from star to star,
 I've seen the watery sea,
 With not a single ship in sight,
 Just ocean there, and me;
 And heard my father snore ... And once,
 As sure as I'm alive,
 Out of those wallowing moon-flecked waves
 I saw a mermaid dive;
 Head and shoulders above the wave,
 Plain as I now see you,
 Combing her hair, now back, now front,
 Her two eyes peeping through;
 Calling me, "Sam!" - quietlike - "Sam!" ...
 But me ... I never went,
 Making believe I kind of thought
 'Twas someone else she meant ...
 Wonderful lovely there she sat,
 Singing the night away,
 All in the solitudinous sea
 Of that there lonely bay.
 P'raps, ' and he'd smooth his hairless mouth,
 'P'raps, if 'twere now, my son,
 P'raps, if I heard a voice say, "Sam!" ...
 Morning would find me gone.'

The focus in this poem is on the old man's change in attitude. Many years ago, he made "believe [he] kind of thought / 'Twas someone else she meant ...", that is, he chose the matter-of-fact life, ignoring the richness of the imaginative life that was being offered him. Now his attitude is different. The poem concludes with this tentative reaching out to the world of the preternatural: "'P'raps, if 'twere now, my son, ... / Morning would find me gone.'" The repetition of "P'raps" in the penultimate line reinforces the hesitant, sincere quality of the old man's narrative. It brings home to the reader that his reaching towards the preternatural is a genuine gesture; thus highlighting the contrast between his insincere "[m]aking believe" in response to the mermaid's invitation many years ago, and his yearning for her world now. This poem thus shows the appeal of the preternatural world, as represented by the mermaid, exercised on someone who has clearly developed from being relatively unresponsive to being far more receptive. Sadly, however, we do not see the invitation repeated.

The very short poem "Flood Water" (CP, p. 541) from Inward Companion: Poems, published in 1950, focuses on the nature of a traveller's vision of a naiad:

What saw I - crouching by that pool of water
 Bright-blue in the flooded grass,
 Of ash-white sea-birds the remote resort, and
 April's looking-glass? -
 Was it mere image of a dream-dazed eye -
 That startled Naiad - as the train swept by?

The question is left dangling in mid-air as the speaker humbly suggests that he could have been prey to an illusion; but only after the scene has been vividly depicted, only after the reader is shown the sight too. The image of the naiad as "crouching" and "startled" seems so detailed as to lend the vision a certain objectivity. But, clearly, the decision as to what to believe is left with the reader.

De la Mare's evident fascination with and partiality for this species of fairy being does not prevent his clear-sightedness about their potentiality for

evil. "The Old Angler" (CP, pp. 226-28) depicts an old fisherman's devastating experience with a naiad who, in parting, "[t]ossed up her chin, and laughed - / A mocking, icy, inhuman note" (CP, p. 228).

The group of poems on the subject of witches does not strictly form a part of those about fairy beings but, as was pointed out in Chapter One, is a related category, and hence to be discussed under the larger heading of the preternatural.³⁷ "The Ride-by-Nights" (CP, pp. 175-76) from Peacock Pie is a lighthearted, purely descriptive and atmospheric poem, of which the first four lines read as follows:

Up on their brooms the Witches stream,
Crooked and black in the crescent's gleam;
One foot high, and one foot low,
Bearded, cloaked, and cowed, they go.

It is especially the light, quick rhythm of this poem which enhances its exhilarating yet elusive quality. More complex are "The Witch" (CP, pp. 120-21), "The Journey" (CP, pp. 128-30), both from The Listeners and Other Poems published in 1912, and "Pigs" (CP, pp. 435-37), from the much later Bells and Grass: A Book of Rhymes published in 1941.

The first poem, "The Witch", presents a weary old witch quite sympathetically; a treatment which, judging from the attitude which emerges from an informal conversation with the poet, is not uncharacteristic of him. In this conversation, the recording of which de la Mare was unaware, he tells his interviewer about Lord Masefield, "a great judge", trying a witch:

She was acquitted. And he said in his summing up ...:
"You have been acquitted of the charge against you, and you are now free, as free as any of us, to depart from this court and go back to where you please. And you can go just how you please, in any vehicle at all, from a broomstick to a coach."
That's what he actually said. Lovely.

De la Mare's sympathy with the young woman and the judge's verdict is evident. He concludes this anecdote in a tone of voice which sounds almost regretful: "She went on her feet. No broomstick."³⁸

"The Witch" does not present a young woman who is tried for witchcraft, but neither does it present the conventional picture of the evil sorceress, as do the other two poems. The poem commences:

Weary went the old Witch,
Weary of her pack,
She sat her down by the churchyard wall,
And jerked it off her back.

The cord brake, yes, the cord brake,
Just where the dead did lie,
And Charms and Spells and Sorceries
Spilled out beneath the sky.

Weary was the old Witch;
She rested her old eyes
From the lantern-fruited yew trees,
And the scarlet of the skies;

And out the dead came stumbling,
From every rift and crack,
Silent as moss, and plundered
The gaping pack.

Because of the sympathetic portrayal of the weary old witch and her total unawareness of the alarming consequences of the breaking of the cord, the reader is not alienated from her. The mischief-makers are rather the dead:

They wish them, three times over,
Away they skip full soon:
Bat and Mole and Leveret,
Under the rising moon:

Owl and Newt and Nightjar ...

The radically new perspective given the reader is in the viewing of these night-creatures as incarnations of human beings who are thought of by others as dead on the evidence of their tombstones:

Names may be writ; and mounds rise;
Purporting, Here be bones:
But empty is that churchyard
Of all save stones.

Owl and Newt and Nightjar,
Leveret, Bat, and Mole
Haunt and call in the twilight
Where she slept, poor soul.

This is clearly a hybrid poem according to the categories set up in the first chapter, as it features the activities of the so-called dead as much as, or

more so, than it does those of the old witch. She, after all, is merely sleeping as a result of fatigue and it is the mischievous inhabitants of the graveyard who, in a very sprightly manner, take advantage of the situation in which her charms are made available to them.

"The Journey" (CP, pp. 128-30), published in the same volume as "The Witch", forms a stark contrast to the poem discussed above. Its tone is altogether more serious. It tells of a wanderer's struggle with a subtly seductive, dangerous presence who speaks to him "through the silence of the long past". His warnings against her also emanate "vaguely from the hiding-place of memory". She thus appears to represent an archetypally evil force, and de la Mare never depicts her as ambivalent (her appearance alone is beautiful), but as unadulteratedly evil. The witch tries to tempt the wanderer, who is "[h]eart-sick ..., / Footsore and parched"; his innermost self warns him against her, and what Jung would call the forces of the collective unconscious aid him in this awareness of the witch's true reality:

And vaguely from the hiding-place of memory
 Voices seemed to cry:
 'What is the darkness of one brief life-time
 To the deaths thou hast made us die?

 'Heed not the words of the Enchantress
 Who would us still betray.'
 And sad with the echo of their reproaches,
 Doubting, he turned away.
 (st. 5-6, CP, pp. 128-29)

The use of the plural personal pronoun "us" suggests that the awareness of evil embodied in the witch, or at least in this kind of sorceress, is in fact intuitive to man, and the young man is initially able to follow his inner voice of true knowledge by refusing the witch's tempting offer of "'shelter and quiet ..., / And apples for thirst withal'". But this does not daunt the witch in imposing her offer upon him. Though we are never explicitly presented with the young man's moment of surrender to the witch's wiles, we feel certain of his yielding to her by the presentation, finally, of the seeds of promise that similar temptation will at last, on a future journey, be

overcome. It is in stanza 13, the second of those quoted below, in the dying away of the voices (the mention of which is followed by ellipsis), that the surrender on the part of the wanderer to the witch is suggested:

And the last gold beam across the green world
Faltered and failed, as he
Remembered his solitude and the dark night's
Inhospitallity.

And he looked upon the witch with eyes of sorrow
In the darkening of the day;
And turned him aside into oblivion;
And the voices died away

And the Witch stepped down from her casement:
In the hush of night he heard
The calling and wailing in dewy thicket
Of bird to hidden bird.

And gloom stole all her burning crimson,
Remote and faint in space
As stars in gathering shadow of the evening
Seemed now her phantom face.

And one night's rest shall be a myriad,
Mid dreams that come and go;
Till heedless fate, unmoved by weakness, bring him
This same strange by-way through:

To the beauty of earth that fades in ashes,
The lips of welcome, and the eyes
More beauteous than the feeble shine of Hesper
Lone in the lightening skies:

Till once again the Witch's guile entreat him;
But, worn with wisdom, he
Steadfast and cold shall choose the dark night's
Inhospitallity.

(st. 12-18, CP, pp. 129-30)

The final message is one of hope; lonely, spiritual hope, but all the more ultimately positive for that. The main topic of this poem is "The Journey", as its title suggests, and the final outcome of this pilgrim's progress is hinted at as positive, even if one is not shown the realization of this. The witch serves as the incarnation of all that is superficially beautiful but spiritually destructive. Ultimately, however, the earnest pilgrim is portrayed as triumphant over her wiles as, "worn with wisdom", he is able to choose the path of good, right and truth, even if it does appear in the guise

of "the dark night's / Inhospitality". The witch in this poem thus serves a symbolic purpose, but at the same time is portrayed in one of her conventional guises - the deceptively beautiful - whereby she is attempting to conceal her truly evil nature.

"Pigs" (CP, pp. 435-37), like "The Journey", presents a witch at her most evil, malicious and destructive, but this time in a more concrete and specific way (perhaps because it is written for children) than in "The Journey", where the details of the young wanderer's encounter with the witch are left largely to the reader's imagination and the witch operates as a kind of symbol of spiritual evil. Here, the conflict is between the landlord of an inn and the "Witch of the Woods" who "winsome rides / Her milk-white ass upon" (st. 3, CP, p. 435). The witch avenges herself upon the landlord, who refuses her permission to let her pigs feed on the windfalls in his orchard, by casting a spell of hoary age over his entire establishment:

He sees his Inn a ruin hoar,
Mantled with ivy thick and close,
Wherein a host of fearless birds
In tumult comes and goes.

He sees his gnarled grey apple trees
Bent like old men, and fruitless all;
He sees a broken bridge lead down
To a wild waterfall.

And on the hand that holds his knife
Age hath turned white the scattered hairs;
And in his ear a wind makes moan
In drear and dreamy airs
(st. 16-18, CP, p. 437)

Finally, it is suggested that the witch and her ass have been metamorphosed into "one lone ghostly crow" and a "snow-white blackbird" (st. 23, CP, p. 437), which would indicate the witch's being in contact with sufficient power to bring about the transformation of herself and her surroundings. A second interesting aspect of the poem is the unearthly, or preternatural, atmosphere which prevails. In the second stanza, the cock's knowledge of the witch's arrival is attributed to his being "more than earthly wise"; and towards the end of the poem, "Old Chanticleer"'s crow is described as a "whoop unearthly

strange" (st. 19, CP, p. 437). There is a reference to the borderland where dream and the preternatural become one in the image depicting the perspective of the owl, "whose real is now / The sorcery of a dream" (st. 21, CP, p. 437). The witch's sorcery is thus related to the world of dream, from where she presumably derives her power, power enough to transform radically the state of actuality.

Having viewed de la Mare's very frequent use of aspects of dream and the preternatural throughout his poetry, often as an end and interest in themselves, I now intend to look closely at his ways of interweaving these topics of interest with other themes important in and central to his work as a whole. The primary one among them is love.

Perhaps the sections into which de la Mare himself divides the material selected for use in his anthology Love could guide us in discovering his views on the subject, especially as he claims that all the extracts published in this anthology appear to him to express "the chameleonic truth about it [love]".³⁹ His own poetry of course provides the major insights, certainly with regard to the interweaving of this theme with the topics of dream and the preternatural.

Among the various aspects into which de la Mare subdivides love in his arrangement of the poetry in his anthology are love "'in the springtime'", love of "things great and small", love for and between "children and friends", and then, chiefly, in terms of the space devoted to it, love between men and women. The final area to be considered is divine love, the subject of de la Mare's final section.

In both his lengthy introduction to this anthology, as well as in his choice of material, de la Mare pays much attention to the intense unhappiness, or sheer indifference, to which erotic love may lead, and he stresses that married love forms no exception:

... the supreme and overmastering desire of any two humans who are in love with one another is to be together and alone, in a shared and mutual solitude.... this very eureka, marriage, that ensures and

legalises this craved-for felicity, is an unfailing short cut to mockery and laughter, broad, 'blue' and shrill.⁴⁰

His awareness of the unhappiness which it is possible for love to cause is illustrated by the titles of several sections in his anthology, for instance, "The Fever and the Fret", "Love Thwarted and Unrequited", "Love Betrayed" and "Love Lamented". An unusual poem of his own which illustrates unhappy love is "Thus Her Tale" (CP, pp. 301-03) from The Fleeting and Other Poems, published in 1933. This poem presents a variety of perspectives on the subject of the poem, the "her" referred to in the title. Opinions are provided by rather unorthodox sources: "the fire-tinged bramble", "the wind of sundown", "a thousand frondlets and the willow tree", "a sliding brook", "stony rock", and "the woodland ... owl". The form of the poem, eleven stanzas of six long lines each, rhyming abcbdb, is appropriately complicated, and effectively complements the ponderous subject matter. The "punctual fickle moon" finally addresses the subject directly:

'Unstilled yet tranquil Phantom, see, thou canst not hide thy form from me:
When last thy anguished body trod these meadows fresh and fair,
I, the ringing sand-dunes of the vast Sahara hoared with light:
What secret calls thee from the shades; why hither dost thou fare?' ...

Finally, in stanzas 9 and 10, the female ghost speaks for herself:

A hand upon her narrow breast, her head bent low in shadowiness;
'I've come,' sighed voice like muted bell of nightbird in the trees,
'To tell again for all to hear, the wild remorse that suffers me,
No single thought of rest or hope whereon to muse at ease.

'Self-slaughtered I, for one I loved, who could not give me love again,
Uncounted now the Autumns since that twilight hour malign
When, insensate for escape from a hunger naught could satisfy,
I vowed to God no more would I in torment live and pine.
Alas! He turned His face away, and woeful penance laid on me -
That every night make tryst must I till life my love resign.'

Again, it is a situation between lovers which gives rise to ghostly manifestations; but here de la Mare introduces too the tradition whereby no rest is granted to the "self-slaughtered". The condemnation of bramble and wind gives way eventually to seemingly disinterested resignation, although hints of scepticism remain: "'Thus her tale!' quoth sod to sod. 'Not ours,

good friends, to challenge it; / Though her blood still cries for vengeance on her murderer from this brake!" The ending is slightly ambivalent, as "her murderer" may be herself, but could be her lover, refusing to requite her love. Whichever the case, de la Mare has depicted a soul in torment as a result of unhappy love, with a set period for her to play out her doom, namely the rest of her earthly lover's life. The preternatural element is present both in the speaking of the natural objects and in the wandering of the spectre.

An ostensibly slighter poem than "Thus Her Tale" is the far shorter "The Captive" (CP, p. 390), published in Memory and Other Poems in 1938. But, by virtue of its subtleties (in particular, its emphasis on that which is unspoken and implicit rather than explicit), it is perhaps more effective than the longer, earlier poem. The first two stanzas simply create setting and atmosphere; it is only in the third that the phantom is introduced, "[d]oomed to love's solitude", and very evocatively described in the fourth and fifth stanzas. Perhaps because of the very lack of explanation regarding the details of her plight, this poem is particularly haunting in its effect:

When gloaming droops
 To the raven's croak,
 And the nightjar churs
 From his time-gnarled oak
 In the thunder-stricken wood:

When the drear dark waters
 'Neath the sallows hoar
 Shake the veils of night
 With their hollow roar,
 Plunging deep in flood;

Spectral, wan
 From unquiet rest,
 A phantom walks
 With anguished breast,
 Doomed to love's solitude.

Her footstep is leaf-like,
 Light as air,
 Her raiment scarce stirs
 The gossamer.
 While from shadowy hood

In the wood-light pale
Her dream-ridden eyes,
Without sorrow or tear,
Speculation, surmise,
Wildly, insanely brood.

It is words such as "wan", "unquiet", "anguished", "doomed", culminating in "[w]ildly, insanely brood", which create the effect of torment, lack of peace, tortured restlessness. Yet, de la Mare ensures a measure of sympathy for this phantom in a way he did not in "Thus Her Tale". In the latter poem, the ghost was described as: "'That sallow face, and eyes that seemed to stare as if in dream, / Narrow shoulders, long lean hands, and hair like withered grass in hue, / Pale lips drawn thwart with grieving in stars' silver mocking beam.'" The picture provided by the "sliding brook", as speaker of the poem at this point, is largely negative. In "The Captive", however, it is a portrait of the finest delicacy that is depicted: "Her footstep is leaf-like, / Light as air, / Her raiment scarce stirs / The gossamer." The shortness of the lines, the prevalence of quiet consonants, the sense of transparency provided by the vowel-sounds, all contribute to the gossamer quality of the atmosphere. The reader's admiration and sympathy are thus won well before the last line, so that the revelation of the expression in "[h]er dream-ridden eyes" comes unexpectedly, but we are ready to sympathize, not condemn. (It is interesting to note the dreamy expression of the eyes in both cases, again hinting at the correspondence for de la Mare of dream life to the world beyond death.)

In two poems from his last collection, O Lovely England and Other Poems, published in 1953, de la Mare also combines the theme of lovers with his interest in ghosts. The first, called "She" (CP, p. 623), consists of the bitter utterance by a ghost-speaker. As in "Thus Her Tale", it is unhappy love which results in torment for the dead, in lack of rest. Although "doomed to silence", the dead man is nevertheless capable of wishing and willing a curse on the one responsible for his unhappiness on earth and beyond.

"It is a Wraith" (CP, p. 627), the other poem on the subject of lovers and

ghosts, is a particularly haunting, evocative and lovely work in which it is not clear that the ghost was ever part of a situation involving earthly lovers. It seems rather that the speaker has fallen in love with a wraith, whom he addresses as "Angel", and is simply waiting for death to unite him with her:

It is a wraith - no mortal - haunts my way,
Of a strange loveliness Time cannot snare,
Nor fretting of mortality decay,
Nor death defeat that feeds on all things fair.

What is desire but this one tryst to keep?
What my heart's longing but to await the hour
When to full recognition it shall leap,
As into summer flames the opening flower?

No mockery lurks within those steadfast eyes;
False words spring not from lips as mute as these;
Ages have learned that longing to be wise;
Love to survive life's cold inconstancies;
Have patience, Angel. With this dust's last sigh
Whisper my mouth thy name, and whispering, die!

The fact that this sonnet contains no hint of earthly knowledge of each other before death seems to suggest that the meeting beyond the grave would in fact be the first one; the phrase "full recognition" supports this impression. This poem thus appears to present one with the interesting possibility of a love to be consummated only beyond the gates of death.⁴¹

The most spiritual form of love is of course God's love, and de la Mare's presentation of it in his anthology has a marked Christian flavour. He cites extracts from the Gospels of Luke and John, from Corinthians, from Juliana of Norwich's Revelations of Divine Love, from Traherne and Isaac Watts; and among the poets represented are Hopkins, Herbert, Rossetti and Blake. The final poem in the anthology is perhaps surprisingly by the agnostic Hardy, but its message is a suitable one: "Said my own voice talking to me; / 'That the greatest of things is Charity ...'"⁴²

Among de la Mare's own poems, divine love is often presented by way of some form of dream frame, even if it is an implicit one, as in "A Ballad of Christmas" (CP, pp. 319-20)⁴³ where the legendary aspect of the tale removes

it from actuality. Dream, in its otherness, provides the ideal vehicle for conveying the supernatural aspect of love. Other very powerful poems on this subject are "Out of a Dream" (CP, p. 495) and "The Burning-Glass" (CP, pp. 463-64), both discussed in other contexts earlier on.⁴⁴

The subject areas chosen by de la Mare in three of his anthologies present a good idea of his priorities. Come Hither is a collection "for the young of all ages", that is, for children and for that aspect of man which retains or is able to recapture the vision of childhood. The title of Behold, This Dreamer! indicates de la Mare's interest in dream and its ramifications, and finally, Love incorporates the areas discussed in the preceding pages. But there are of course other areas of interest as well, related to and interwoven with those aforementioned. Among these is the self, how it relates to its inner and outer worlds, how it is confronted with and may find itself in solitude.

De la Mare's poem "The Bottle" (CP, pp. 288-89), with the harsh, grim picture it presents of a drug addict, suggests the sadness of lack of peace within.⁴⁵ Solitude is often viewed as providing an opportunity for dream as well as for developing a relationship with the self, for growth in self-knowledge. Sam, in the poem named after him (CP, pp. 165-66), has undergone such growth towards an affirmation of his imaginative aspect since the time of "Making believe [he] kind of thought / 'Twas someone else she meant ...", and his perpetual contact over a prolonged period of time with "the solitudinous sea / Of that there lonely bay" has presumably played no small part in this process.⁴⁶ The mermaid seemed to require Sam's solitude to approach him in the first place ("Just ocean there, and me ..."), and more solitude gradually leads him to a tentatively positive response to her. "The Old Angler" (CP, pp. 226-28) is a very poignant presentation of the possible loneliness and negative experiences which may be found in solitude.⁴⁷

Solitude, like dream - which is inevitably dependent upon at least the solitude of the dreamer's consciousness - is occasionally presented as an opportunity for reflecting upon, or experiencing, the immanence of death and

the possibilities of an after life. This area of interest has been touched upon in several earlier discussions of poems.⁴⁸ It seems sufficient to mention here "The Old Men" (CP, p. 206), which presents a shared solitude between those separated from the rest of the world by their age:

Old and alone, sit we,
 Caged, riddle-rid men;
 Lost to Earth's 'Listen!' and 'See!'
 Thought's 'Wherefore?' and 'When?'

.....
 We speak not; trembles each head;
 In their sockets our eyes are still;
 Desire as cold as the dead;
 Without wonder or will.

And One, with a lanthorn, draws near,
 At clash with the moon in our eyes:
 'Where art thou?' he asks: 'I am here,'
 One by one we arise.

And none lifts a hand to withhold
 A friend from the touch of that foe:
 Heart cries unto heart, 'Thou art old.'
 Yet, reluctant, we go.

The inevitability of death is a concept ever-present to those "old and alone"; but perhaps the saddest aspect of their solitude as here presented appears in the third stanza, not quoted above. It comprises the loss of imagination in the aged, perhaps the result of a growing consciousness that possibilities are becoming fewer:

The ruinous moon
 Lifts on our faces her light,
 Whence all dreaming is gone.

This is one of the rare occasions where the sense of death is linked with absence of imagination rather than with its fertility or potential opportunity for fertile expression beyond the gates of death.

The final theme I wish to consider in this chapter is that of time, especially as it finds its expression in de la Mare's longest poem Winged Chariot (CP, pp. 551-96). This poem centres on the theme of time in a rather

particular way; it is as though the topic of time provides a focal point from which the poet may travel in various directions that interest him. As much of his poetry presents aspects of his vision of life through the filters of dream and the preternatural, so Winged Chariot ostensibly concentrates on time but in a way which also has a filtering function and thus enables the poet to present other of his concerns rather than to make time the exclusive subject of the poem.

Winged Chariot, as its title implies, reveals a fascination with time itself in its various guises, only one of which is expressed through "this absurd concern with clocks" (CP, p. 551). While dealing primarily with the subject of time, de la Mare is also able to use this long poem as a point of departure for reflecting on other of his concerns: love, dream, the preternatural. Such reflections are made possible by the all-pervasiveness of time, affecting every facet of human experience. The second epigraph - and there are three before the first line of the poem - gives a good indication of the nature of the poem in terms of the situation of the speaker, including the identity of the one addressed, the "friend" of line 1. The second epigraph reads as follows: "'As I sat by myself, I talked to myself, / And myself replied to me ...'" The relationship with the self as presented here is important; the poet, at the age of seventy-eight, is engaged in a dialogue with himself, reflecting on the nature of time, but in the process giving himself ample opportunity to meditate upon the nature of life itself. This long poem of over four hundred stanzas is written in an appropriately flexible form: stanzas of variable length loosely joined together by means of epigraphs. De la Mare thus weaves various interests around the central topic of time in a rather loosely structured fashion.

The second verse paragraph, for instance, in which the speaker upbraids himself for his own obsession with clock time, presents an evocative image denoting the incompatibility of the powers of the imagination with clock time:

If Time's a stream - and we are told it's so,
 Its peace were shattered if you check its flow;
 What Naiad then ev'n fingertip would show -
 Her imaged other-world in ruins? ... No:

Should once there haunt your too-attentive ear
 A peevish pendulum, no more you'll hear
 The soundless thunder of the distant weir
 Which is Eternity

(CP, p. 552)

The preternatural image of the naiad revealing herself only to one unhaunted by a "peevish pendulum" is a subtle allusion to the link between imaginative receptivity and preternatural experience.⁴⁹ Immediately after the extract quoted above, de la Mare continues to celebrate, in timeless, imaginatively receptive moments such as these, the proximity of "[b]lest reverie":

When from the serfdom of this world set free,
 The self a moment rapt in peace may be;

.....

But to no tic-toc rune.
 (CP, p. 552)

These lines, which stress the need for freedom from bondage to conventional clock time, serve as a reminder of the connection in de la Mare between dream, the preternatural and his other interests (in this case time versus timelessness), and what he is able to achieve in his poetry by means of the interrelatedness of these topics, namely the expression of a complex but coherent world view.

The following few verse paragraphs reveal de la Mare's interest in the ways of skylarks, bees, midges ("Sylphs scarcely of Time but of mere transiency"), elephants: "Share they, think you, our sense of time with us?" (CP, p. 553). He is thus pointing to Nature's independence of clock time; nonetheless, it retains its very real sense of its own time, different from that of the clock, "As testifies 'Jack-go-to-bed-at-noon'; / Airiest of ghosts, he goes to bed at noon!" (CP, p. 552). Similarly, the cuckoo knows - though it is mysterious how - "Lovesick from Africa, to flit in Spring" (CP, p. 553).

Another facet of life which appears to be independent of clock time is that of human emotion. In fact, the theme of the poem could perhaps be best

summarised thus: "The veriest numskull clock-cluck understands, / ... A subtler language stirs in whispering sands" (CP, p. 555). This view gives de la Mare the licence to write about clock time at length as well as to dwell on the various aspects of the "subtler language".

Time itself, true time as opposed to clock time, is described in the most sensitive, delicate way: "Snow-soft as ghost-moth is Time's winnowing wing" (CP, p. 556). The assonance in "snow" and "ghost", "soft" and "moth", as well as the s- and w- alliteration bind the words closely together in the airiest of ways. And at a later stage in the same poem, the versatility of the metre and of the images recreates a similar airy impression of time:

Time 'real'; time rare; time wildfire-fleet; time tame;
 Time telepathic, out of space, and aim;
 Time starry; lunatic; ice-bleached; of flame;
 Dew-transient, yet immutably the same;
 Meek-mild as chickweed in a window-frame;

Tardy as gathering dust in rock-hewn vault;
 Fickle as moon-flake in a mirror caught
 At pause on some clear gem's scarce-visible fault ...
 (CP, p. 563)

The first few lines, in their lightness and mobility, give one a vivid sense of the effervescence and evanescence of this ever-evaporating element of which only the name is concrete. But then, with the phrase "immutably the same", is introduced a sense of stillness, of lack of urgency. Both these aspects of time are important to de la Mare: its elusiveness is to be taken account of, for "'Moments, like sun-discs on a rippled sea, / No heed paid to them merely cease to be'" (CP, p. 566); as well as the possibility of its transcending itself in a sense of timelessness, the "infinite gentleness" (CP, p. 563) with which time may flow.

Among the themes woven around that of time is the one of silence, solitude and the self ("when ... / Silence beleaguers every nerve and sense, / Self-solitude is made the more intense" - CP p. 556), and this theme leads on to the presentation of another of de la Mare's favourite subjects, that of ghosts, able to reveal themselves in the context of the silent, solitary state

of the perceiver: "Heeded perceptions of a secret mind / Less closely to the physical confined" (CP, p. 557). Childhood, love, "the impossible she" - all receive due attention in the course of this poem.

Centrally featured is an "old fable" entitled "The Palace of Time". It begins:

A self-sick wanderer, in the leprous light
Of death-drear forest at the fall of night
Came out on no less derelict a sight ...
(CP, p. 559)

The sight is of a ruined mansion, which "called to mind a dream he once was in ..." The ruined mansion is the Palace of Time and reveals to the wanderer a "'bridegroom and bride / On the Dead-Sea shore'":

'She, then, was Witchcraft, and on evil bent,
Foe of the abandoned, lost, and malcontent,
And doomed to ruin whithersoever they went?'
(CP, p. 561)

In a way which is typical of de la Mare himself, this legend leaves us with a mysterious unanswered question: "'And he, this wanderer? What fate was his?' ..." (CP, p. 561) The moral of the legend is drawn in the following verse paragraph, and it takes us back to the theme mentioned at the opening of this discussion as representing de la Mare's most highly esteemed value, namely love:

Love is life's liberty. 'Time' will snare remain
Until to peace of mind and heart we attain,
And Paradise, whose source it was, come back again.
(CP, p. 562)

De la Mare further touches on subjects like history, its idolized figures (poets, artists), and the discovery of the atom when he "[s]till in long clothes was" (CP, p. 571; a typical personal touch in this often informal poem). This leads to a consideration of the coming of Christ, and the possibilities that lie beyond death:

Yet, even if, dying, we should cease to be,
However brief our mortal destiny,
Were this for having lived outrageous fee?
(CP, p. 575)

These lines typify de la Mare's highly affirmative attitude towards the value of human life, which includes for most of us "having loved, laughed, talked, dreamed, toiled, endured our dree" But he does not exclude the pain; instead he confronts it but affirms that it may be transcended:

Days there may come that wish there were no morrow,
 No night of weeping, nor a dawn of sorrow;
 Yet only out of bonds as bleak and narrow,
 Can we the rapture of forgiveness borrow.
 (CP, p. 575)

As in the case of so many of de la Mare's passages on the meaning of human existence, there are references which are not specifically Christian but contain the overtones of a religion which is life-affirming and helps in healing and strengthening the bonds of human love. Not that the poem does not contain some explicit Christian references, but even then they are delicate and subtle:

Not by mere age, renown, power, place, or pride
 The heart makes measurement. Its quickening tide
 Found once its egress in a wounded side:

Love is its joyful citadel.

(CP, p. 577)

In the latter part of the poem, after indicating his intense interest in the mysteries of life (as expressed in the following stanza), de la Mare focuses a significant amount of attention on the world of dream:

Life's dearest mysteries lie near, not far.
 The least explored are the familiar;
 As, to a child, the twinkling of a star;
 As, to ourselves, ourselves - who know not what we are!
 (CP, p. 576)

Dream is depicted as inhabiting a totally different world from that in which clock-time plays a significant role. De la Mare devotes an entire verse paragraph to sleeping dream; it opens as follows:

'... Life is a Terrace-walke with an Arbour at one end, where we repose, and dream over our past perambulations The Soule watcheth when wee sleep'

Throughout the day throbs on this inward loom;
 Though little heeded be its whirr and thrum.
 Come then the dark. And, senses lulled and numb,
 The sleeper lies; defenceless, passive, mum.

Hypnos awaits him, and what dreams may come;
 The Actual faint as rumour in a tomb.

Stealthy as snow, vicissitudes drift by -
 Watched, without pause, by some strange inward eye -
 Lovely; bizarre; inane; we know not why!
 Nor what of Space and Time they occupy,
 Who's their deviser, or when his puppetry.
 (CP, p. 581)

The distance between the worlds of dream and actuality, the "lovely" and "bizarre" qualities of dream life, the mystery inherent in the whole process of dreaming and even the theatrical image used to depict dream life: all echo the earlier prose composition, de la Mare's introduction to Behold, This Dreamer!, discussed at length in Chapter One.⁵⁰ The limitless potential of what may be experienced as well as the vast difference between dream time and ordinary time is suggested in the following lines:

... What then may not befall
 In realms where nothing's four-dimensional?
 Where nothing's real, yet all seems natural;
 And what seems ages is no time at all?
 (CP, p. 582)

De la Mare's presentation of dream is extended to include more than simply sleeping dreams, when he writes:

Vision and reverie, fantasies, ecstasies,
 No hours 'keep' they, when, ranging as they please,
 Over the hills we fare ... over the seas
 Senses celestial, mind's antipodes,
 Nought Reason can invoke, or Logic seize ...
 (CP, p. 583)

Finally, still using time as the central point from which his discussion of other subjects departs, de la Mare writes about poetry, fantasy ("Day-dream, and night-, may richest pasture be - / There strays the Unicorn called Fantasy" - CP, p. 587), memory, the past. The poem includes an anecdote about a cat, introduced with the epigraph "Les Chinois voient l'heure dans l'oeil des chats" (CP, p. 592), which is amusing without lacking

profundity. Its import is the possible disadvantages of knowledge and reason, for the cat returns to the world of instinct with delight: "Then slept; and dreamed; and slept. 'Twas paradise" (CP, p. 593). Significantly, the poem ends with a celebration of poetry and love; at the last it is concerned not primarily with time but with those aspects of life which transcend time. The poem, deficient perhaps as a whole because of its lack of tight structure, nevertheless presents an interesting amalgam of de la Mare's views and values, in a charming albeit rambling way.

In this chapter I have tried to illustrate the interrelating of dream and the preternatural in de la Mare with his other interests: love, the self and solitude, and time.

NOTES

¹ See pp. 1-2 and 21-26 above.

² See pp. 22-23 and 26-36 above.

³ See pp. 28-29 and 36-40 above.

⁴ See pp. 21-22 above.

⁵ A recurring sleeping dream is presented in "The Dark Château" (CP, pp. 123-24), the dark château being the symbol of the unattainable ("Would that I could steal in!"). "Not One" (CP, p. 488) and "Uncircumventible" (CP, pp. 614-15) implicitly celebrate sleeping dreams. "Bewitched" (CP, p. 178) and "The Old King" (CP, pp. 263-64), both with sleeping dreams as subjects, will be mentioned in other contexts on p. 143 and p. 150 respectively, each being a kind of hybrid poem, interesting not only for its featuring of a sleeping dream.

⁶ See, for example, "The Dreamer" (CP, pp. 206-07); and the comments on "The Imagination's Pride" (CP, pp. 243-44), pp. 22-23 above, and on "The Old King" (CP, pp. 263-64), p. 150 below.

⁷ See pp. 26-36 above.

⁸ See pp. 59-60 above.

⁹ Two interesting poems also presenting a form of nightmare are "From Amid the Shadows" (CP, p. 616) and "Eureka!" (CP, pp. 683-84), which both confront the dreamer with unwelcome possibilities for the after life. The latter also provides the dreamer with welcome relief from the horrors suggested to him in his sleep on his awakening, indicated as being often the case in poems featuring nightmare (see pp. 63-64 above).

¹⁰ See pp. 4-5 above.

¹¹ V. Sackville-West, "Walter de la Mare and The Traveller", Warton lecture on English poetry, Proceedings of the British Academy, XXXIX (1953), 30.

- ¹² See pp. 26-27 above.
- ¹³ See the examples mentioned on p. 110, n. 9 above.
- ¹⁴ See st. 63-64, CP, p. 513.
- ¹⁵ See st. 83-87, CP, p. 510.
- ¹⁶ See pp. 11-12 above.
- ¹⁷ See pp. 67-68 above.
- ¹⁸ Mentioned on p. 59 above.
- ¹⁹ CP, p. 319n.
- ²⁰ See, for examples, "All That's Past" (CP, pp. 116-17); "The Exile" (CP, p. 201); "Eden" (CP, p. 269); "Dreams" (st. 34-36, CP, p. 353); "All the Way" (CP, p. 431); "The Traveller" (st. 49, CP, p. 506).
- ²¹ See pp. 26-36 above for an earlier discussion of this poem.
- ²² See pp. 10-11 above for a discussion of this poem.
- ²³ See pp. 14-16 above.
- ²⁴ See, for example, "The Revenant" (CP, p. 199).
- ²⁵ See, for example, "The Remonstrance" (CP, p. 200).
- ²⁶ See, for example, "Thus Her Tale" (CP, pp. 301-03).
- ²⁷ See, for example, "Thus Her Tale" (CP, pp. 301-03) and "Adieu" (CP, pp. 303-04); the former discussed in the section on the interweaving of themes in de la Mare, in connection with unhappy love, on pp. 97-99 above.
- ²⁸ See, for example, "The Ghost" (CP, pp. 196-97), discussed on pp. 80-81 above, and "Who's That?" (CP, p. 236).
- ²⁹ See, for example, "The Remonstrance" (CP, p. 200), discussed on pp. 82-83 above.
- ³⁰ See, for example, "Solitude" (CP, p. 367) and "The Others" (CP, p. 542).
- ³¹ See, for example, "Haunted" (CP, p. 541).
- ³² See, for example, "Which?" (CP, p. 385), discussed on pp. 13-14 above, and "The Others" (CP, p. 542), also mentioned in n. 30 above.
- ³³ See pp. 11-12 and 17-21 above.

³⁴ Briggs, pp. 153-56.

³⁵ Briggs, p. 158.

³⁶ See, for example, "Bluebells" (CP, p. 4), "Peak and Puke" (CP, p. 176), "The Stranger" (CP, pp. 446-47).

³⁷ See p. 17 above.

³⁸ "Conversation: (2) 'A Little About Witches'", Walter de la Mare: speaking and reading, Caedmon, TC 1046, 1955.

³⁹ Love, p. cxxxvi.

⁴⁰ Love, p. xciv.

⁴¹ "The Green Room", the short story discussed on pp. 24-26 above, also hints at a kind of love relationship between a man and a woman long dead.

⁴² Love, p. 567.

⁴³ For a discussion of this poem, see pp. 75-76 above.

⁴⁴ For discussions of these poems, see pp. 63-64 and pp. 10-11 and 78-79 respectively.

⁴⁵ Cf. "Drugged" (CP, pp. 235-36), quoted and discussed on pp. 6-7 above.

⁴⁶ For a quotation and discussion of this poem, see pp. 89-90 above.

⁴⁷ For an earlier mention of this poem, see p. 91 above.

⁴⁸ See, for examples, "The Remonstrance" (CP, p. 200), "The Journey" (CP, pp. 128-30) and "The Captive" (CP, p. 390), discussed on pp. 82, 93-95 and 98-99 respectively.

⁴⁹ See pp. 11-16 above for an earlier discussion of this question.

⁵⁰ See pp. 20-26 above.

Chapter Three

THE CHILD AS DREAMER

De la Mare's poetry of dream and the preternatural culminates in his writing for and about children. In this final chapter, which deals with the child in de la Mare's work, there will be less emphasis on the difference between de la Mare's treatment in the case of aspects of dream and that of the preternatural, and more on the otherworldly sphere as a whole, which is, we find, often entered most uncompromisingly in the works where children are involved. Gently, subtly, through the lyric charm of his verse, de la Mare is in much of his work encouraging his readers to take that tentative venture beyond the bounds of the familiar into the unknown. In analysing some of the poems in Peacock Pie,¹ it will be noted how - as in de la Mare's writing for adults - he sometimes does not progress beyond the ordinary everyday sphere, though it is even then presented in a special way, involving both the unfamiliar and the strange. At other times, though the poem begins with the ordinary, it does not remain there: there is a gradual change from the ordinary to the extraordinary (as is the case too in some of his novels and short stories).² In a third case, the ordinary at times progresses further to the preternatural; and in a final set of instances (and this is quite frequently the case in his poetry for children), a poem may commence at once with the preternatural, thus initiating the reader into this particular sphere without preamble.

This chapter will firstly place de la Mare's writing for children within its literary context and of exploring his attitude towards other writers of children's literature who make use of dream-imagery and dream-logic (Lewis Carroll, for instance, about whom de la Mare wrote an essay);³ secondly, it will explore his attitude towards children themselves especially as it is expressed in Early One Morning and other writings. The final and chief part of this chapter will focus on his poems relating to the subject: some from the collections written for children themselves, others about children (but found in collections not specifically intended for them). Additionally, it is hoped that consideration of this special body of poetry within de la Mare's

total poetic work will continue to illustrate points made in earlier chapters, and provide further examples to this end.

As in the case of his writing dream literature, so also with his writing for children, de la Mare operates within an already established tradition. In the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, Isaac Watts wrote poems for children which were simple and of a moral nature, commonly called hymns. De la Mare's quotation of "The Sluggard", one of Watts's poems nowadays most appreciated, and his note to it in Come Hither, show that his approach is far less moralistic than that of Watts. De la Mare acknowledges that "[w]hatever fate befell the Sluggard, I should like to have taken a walk in his garden Maybe he sailed off at last to the Isle of Nightmare, or to the land where it is always afternoon, or was wrecked in Yawning Gap".⁴ Watts's poem includes the following comment in its account of the various contemptible topics of conversation the sluggard has to offer: "He told me his dreams ..." and ends with "thanks to my friends for their care in my breeding / Who taught me betimes to love working and reading".⁵ De la Mare is not concerned with making a moral judgement in the case of the sluggard but is drawn to that very carefree, daydreaming aspect of the sluggard's existence which Watts in his didactic way condemns.

Following the didactic tradition of writing for children established by Isaac Watts, several women in the nineteenth century wrote hymns for children and adopted the persona of a child in their compositions. These hymn writings influenced Blake and constitute one of the inspirations behind his Songs of Innocence and, later, his Songs of Experience; and Blake, in turn, influenced de la Mare. In Blake, however, the child is often used symbolically to comment by implication on the ideals of, or failings in, the adult world. The child's point of view is given considerable status in Blake's work, in which respect he could be said to anticipate de la Mare directly, but there remains a considerable difference between Blake's symbolic use of the child as, for example, a symbol of innocence, or victim of the corruptions prevalent in

eighteenth-century society, and de la Mare's more literal interest in the child as child.

Wordsworth and Traherne, like Blake, give the child a special status as visionary, as prophet: "Mighty Prophet! Seer blest!"⁶ However, where Blake uses the child to comment on the ills in eighteenth-century London society, Wordsworth presents the child as a pastoral figure of innocence, but transfers many of the ideal aspects of Blake's children also to his pastoral shepherd figures and "solitaries". As in Blake, there are Biblical echoes behind Wordsworth's presentation of the child as the voice of truth; the child lives in the same poetic world of superior and privileged simplicity as do his rustic figures.

In Victorian literature, it is clear that a tradition has been established and certain stereotypes accepted: for example, the child is given particular prominence in the novels of Dickens and George Eliot, whose use of the child at times approximates Blake's when they hold the child up to society as an indictment of its ills, either by contrasting the innocence of the child to the corrupt nature of society, or by presenting the child as a victim of that society. At the same time, however, and here they anticipate de la Mare's way of treating the child as interesting for his own sake, their children are distinctly characterized and take their fully individual place within the framework of the novels in which they appear, as for instance Little Nell in The Old Curiosity Shop and Maggie and Tom in The Mill on the Floss.

In later times, through to the present day, more and more books come to be written especially for children: children's literature emerges as a large and recognisable genre. John Rowe Townsend, in Written for Children, provides a very readable history of such works. In tracing the early developments of writing for children, as compared with writing generally read by children even if not specifically intended for them, he comments on the "difference in outlook" between Bunyan, whose Pilgrim's Progress was widely read by children in the early seventeenth century, and Watts, whose Hymns and Spiritual Songs were published in 1707:

Watts's attitudes in fact reflect a softening of the old harsh Puritanism.... By the early eighteenth century new ways of thought, new attitudes to children were gaining ground. The belief that children were naturally sinful went with an old-fashioned fundamentalism; it was giving way to a view, based on the New Learning and on rational theology, that a child began life in a state of innocence. He was, quite literally, a different creature.⁷

The influence of Jean-Jacques Rousseau's Emile on the attitude towards the child is recognised as significant in England, especially on women writers such as Maria Edgeworth and Mary Wollstonecraft. Such was the preparation for the Victorian writers' work.

The chapter in Part One: Before 1840 from Written for Children that mostly concerns us is the final one, "Fact and Fancy", as here we can recognise the origin of the kind of writing which de la Mare was later to develop. "The writer of Goody Two-Shoes complained that 'People stuff Children's Heads with Stories of Ghosts, Fairies, Witches, and such Nonsenses when they are young, and so they continue Fools all their Days.'⁸ This situation, happily, was to change. As de la Mare says:

Not that all the books intended for children in the early nineteenth century were concerned solely with the cautionary and the edifying, which as Charles Lamb said only "starved their little hearts and stuffed their little heads ...". And while moralisms like "'My dear child', answered her father, 'an ox is not in the world for nothing!"; like "Oh, dear Mamma, if I had done as you bade me I should not have had all this pain!"; ... - while moralisms and menaces of this order, with an occasional reminder that God's anger has no respect for persons, and far, far less for little persons, and such wolflets in lamb's clothing as Useful Lessons for Little Misses and Masters, and Paul Pennylove's Poetical Paraphrase of the Pence Table, were prevalent, we must not forget the many merry heart-free exceptions like Dame Wiggins of Lee which was the joy of John Ruskin, or the benefactions of Dame Partlet.... "The interesting and the amusing moreover were then supplanting the improving." Many of the chap-books for children (even of the severe order) were illustrated with admirable cuts by artists. ... And the pattern of versicle of the Dickery-dock order - called a Limerick because it is said to have emanated from Ireland - was already familiar to young ears even in the eighteen-twenties:

There liv'd an Old Woman at Lynn
 Whose nose very near touch'd her chin
 You may easy suppose
 She had plenty of Beaux,
 This charming Old Woman of Lynn.

That - both in form and content - is at least towards Nonsense bound.⁹

De la Mare continues his essay by celebrating the writings of Edward Lear and of course Lewis Carroll, the subject of his essay. Carroll's love for and sensitivity to children, revealed in his life and in his writing, as well as his particular interest in dream, encourage one to expect a sense of affinity on de la Mare's part. The same kind of concern about the relations of dream and reality which de la Mare frequently reveals is shown by Lewis Carroll's ruminations in his diary entry "of February 9th, 1856, with its foreshadowing of the Cheshire Cat's 'We're all mad here'":

Query: when we are dreaming and, as often happens, have a dim consciousness of the fact and try to wake, do we not say and do things which in waking life would be insane? May we not then sometimes define insanity as an inability to distinguish which is the waking and which the sleeping life? We often dream without the least suspicion of unreality: "Sleep hath its own world", and it is often as lifelike as the other.¹⁰

One would suppose de la Mare's sympathies to be more with the implications of the final few comments than with the linking of dream with insanity, but clearly he was intrigued by the same riddle. This is indicated by his citation of Alice's conversation with the Red King in the Introduction to Behold, This Dreamer!¹¹

De la Mare's own writing is not only prepared for by the "many merry heart-free exceptions" which paved the way towards nonsense (referred to in "Lewis Carroll"), but also by the fairy-tale which, as Townsend points out in an extract quoted below, in any case made a significant contribution of its own towards nonsense.

F. J. Harvey Darton in his essay "Children's Books" (in The Cambridge History of English Literature) mentions that it was the inferior chapbook "which preserved to us our scant native fairy lore",¹² and we see that it is

only in the modern era, with Cruikshank's edition of the English translation of the brothers Grimm, that "English childhood re-entered fairyland".

It is as follows that Townsend presents the re-entrance of the imagination by way of the fairy tale into children's literature in England:

In 1802 William Godwin had declared himself in favour of imagination and Perrault's stories; and in 1809 Godwin appears to have edited a volume of Popular Fairy Tales issued by one Benjamin Tabart. But the two great fillips to the fairy tales in England were given by the successful translations of Grimm in 1823-6 and of Hans Andersen by Mary Howitt in 1846 [I]n 1834-40 came E. W. Lane's version of the Arabian Nights, previously available in chapbook and adult editions, but now put into a form which was found suitable for children. John Ruskin wrote his splendid modern fairy tale The King of the Golden River in 1841, though it was not published until ten years later. And ... Henry Cole ... revived a great number of the old fairy-tales in Felix Summerly's Home Treasury (1841-9). Many other stories and collections appeared, and from the mid-century onward fairy tales were generally acceptable ...¹³

In the following extract Darton presents the interconnectedness of the fairy tale, old and modern, with nonsense:

The logical coincided with the historical development. Modern fairy tales began to be written, and the higher kind of levity produced nonsense. Lewis Carroll's two Alice books (1866 and 1872) and Sylvie and Bruno (1889) were works of genius; but they could not have won a hearing and undying applause if the minds of the audience had not been prepared by what had gone before. The fairy tales of Andersen, Kingsley, Jean Ingelow, George MacDonald, Ruskin, Thackeray, Mark Lemon and other writers still living were not glorified folklore; but they could not have been published - perhaps not even written - but for the glory that had come to folklore after repression. Only an age ready to be childish after having learnt the hopelessness of tacking morals on to fairy tales could have welcomed Lear's Book of Nonsense (1846).¹⁴

One could add to this group a book of poetry such as Peacock Pie, de la Mare's collection for children (published in 1913), which comes close in spirit to the kinds of worlds made possible and acceptable by Carroll and Lear, and from which poems are to be discussed later on in this chapter.¹⁵ Indeed, once we realize that de la Mare admired Carroll, as indicated in his essay "Lewis Carroll", that Carroll (Dodgson) admired George MacDonald, as is indicated in the extract quoted below, and that de la Mare himself cites MacDonald twice in

his anthology Love,¹⁶ we have confirmation of the considerable influence that these various authors had on one another:

George MacDonald, poet, novelist, writer for children and Christian philosopher and teacher, was a man entirely after Dodgson's own heart.

... Each was a Christian teacher with no great wish to be called "the Rev.", and with a mystical longing for a poetic fulfilment that was not wholly Christian, Lewis Carroll by way of the little door into the garden, perhaps; MacDonald surely up a magic staircase¹⁷

One need not speculate long on de la Mare's path towards the poetic fulfilment of his "mystical longing": surely it is by way of dream in its various aspects, and through the eyes, lips and mind of the dreaming child, as the poems to be discussed intimate.

De la Mare himself is discussed by Townsend in a chapter entitled "Fantasy between the Wars", where he describes "The Three Sleeping Boys of Warwickshire", one of de la Mare's short stories from Broomsticks, as "the best of all modern short fairy-tales - for a fairy-tale it is though it is set in the relatively recent past, a mere two or three hundred years ago." The story characteristically attributes the happiness of three bitterly ill-treated chimney-sweep apprentices to their dream-play at night. Townsend's concluding comment on this tale encapsulates two of de la Mare's valuable traits as author: "Although it has familiar fairy story ingredients it also has a dimension of human sympathy which the old folk-tales often lack."¹⁸

The kind of tale written in the early stages of children's literature is characterized amusingly by Darton where he quotes the footnote by Sarah Trimmer "which lights up, as by a flash, the whole conception of moral tales":

A mockingbird is introduced into an English scene, and the author, always careful of truth, warns the reader that "the mock-bird is properly a native of America, but is introduced here for the sake of the moral." Volumes could not say more.¹⁹

The tone of the citation draws our attention to the way in which fantasy was once shunned or, if used, rendered acceptable by its explicitness. By the time de la Mare arrived on the scene, however, he was able to fit easily into

a recently established tradition in writing for children, whereby the elements of dream and the preternatural, always pervasive in folk literature (formerly orally conveyed - usually by nurses to their charges) were now made acceptable in respectable literary works for children. De la Mare was thus able to be original and individual without being classified as outrageous. After Lear and Carroll's innovations in the realms of wonderland and nonsense, de la Mare could even seem conservative by comparison; but readers had been prepared, by the various imaginative excursions preceding his own writing, to accept and respond to his delicate and subtly woven fantasies.

An important element which emerges in de la Mare's writing for and about children is his own individual attitude towards them. It is perhaps at its clearest in Early One Morning in the Spring. The book is subtitled Chapters on Children and on Childhood as it is revealed in particular in Early Memories and in Early Writers, which suggests the factual, biographical, yet personal and reminiscent aspect of the work. De la Mare's attitude towards the approach possible between adults and children emerges in his introduction to Early One Morning in which he modestly excludes mentioning his own relationship to them:

Most adults ... are at least friendly to childhood and to children. With a benevolent eye they watch their gambols, are amused at their primitive oddities, give what they suppose to be the countersign, and depart. A few take children as they take one another, just as they come, welcome them for what they are, refrain from making advances, and are gladly admitted on these terms into the confraternity. The very few - as few in books as in life - have the equivalent of what the born gardener is blessed with - a green thumb. He can pluck up a plant and without the least danger examine its roots. However delicate his specimen may be, his cloistered wizardry will succeed in bringing it into flower. He resembles the solitary occasionally to be encountered in one of the London parks, feeding with minute crumbs a cluster of sparrows that hop about his feet as if he were St. Francis in disguise. Can mere crumbs, we ask ourselves, be hypnotic?²⁰

The humility expressed in the above paragraph in relation to the child is extended when he mentions the limitations of even the most inspired state which approximates the childish condition - although his own writings evince that he himself is often capable of attaining such a state:

Such [attitudes as mentioned in the quotations above] are the various degrees of approach between the grown-up and the young, from sheer insensitiveness to the rarest insight and understanding. And yet, I believe those who can win nearest to childhood, and be wholly at peace, at liberty, and at ease in its company, would be the first to acknowledge that they can never get nearer than very near, never actually there.²¹

It would be difficult indeed not to classify de la Mare in the last-mentioned group.

The final paragraph of the introduction suggests the deep respect de la Mare has for the elements contained in childhood as well as the peculiar fascination it exerts over him. He uses the image of an ocean to represent it:

If ... one ventures down to the sea of childhood, it appears ... to be exquisitely shallow. A sky of a blue pale as turquoise arches above it, for the sun's resplendent travelling; look close, and its every drop of water is charged with life. There is a curious minute wildness everywhere. Its tiny ripples, thin as silver, break like the finest of glass upon its sands. One ventures in, and on; the further one wades the greater the danger of drowning, and the more the ocean deepens and widens, spreading out its waters at last towards the illimitable horizon of human life. For Childhood is the name of the world's immediate future; of such, and such alone, is the promise of the kingdom of man.²²

In this elusive, poetic evocation of the world of childhood de la Mare is employing the image of an ocean with its fathomless depths and mysterious beauty to suggest some of the qualities the world of the child contains for him. Its deceptively simple surface conceals sources of energy, layers of profundity, and, ultimately, hope for mankind in terms of its imaginative, spontaneous aspect which needs to be found anew by the adult.

Leonard Clark makes some interesting comments about the kind of child de la Mare writes about and about the poet's own persona in writing for children. Especially illuminating is the distinction Clark draws between the writings of de la Mare for children and those of some of the other poets that have been mentioned:

Lear and Carroll were witty poets, Wordsworth was in deadly earnest, Blake saw children as a mystic enjoys heaven, Stevenson's children were wistful or gay, Allingham's, fanciful, Christina Rossetti held hers in her arms. But Walter de la Mare

wrote as if he were a child himself, as if he were revealing his own childhood, though with the mature gifts of the authentic poet. His children are true to childhood. They are certainly not all children. But they are de la Mare children. And they are alive. He was ensnared by the boy who was the fatherless de la Mare. And that child was modest, withdrawn, in close touch with terrors and splendours, never corrupted by the world, fanciful, constant. The de la Mare child has fears and uncertainties but unusual joys and pleasures. He dwells with common things but is never far in spirit from the supernatural. He is at one and the same time in an England of fields and seas, and in a Nowhere of dreams and sleep. This child is a complex being, very imaginative and always listening.

The appeal of the child-like poet to children - who yet has the "mature gifts of the authentic poet" - is explained as follows:

De la Mare's verses and rhymes give delight because they go to the hearts of children, to the essence of childhood. As Lilian H. Smith wrote in The Unreluctant Years: 'It is this capacity to see "the rarest charm of familiarity in strangeness," the beauty of this earth in its relation to spiritual beauty, separated one from the other only by a veil of gossamer compounded of imagination, vision, and dream, into which beauty breaks through when we least expect it. His mastery of flexible and subtle rhythms is so deft that it is, perhaps, hardly realised.'²³

It is thus not only the content of de la Mare's poetry which makes it attractive to children but also his metrical skill and subtle control of rhythms that unconsciously exert an influence on the listener. Furthermore, the distinctive characteristics of de la Mare's writing for children are viewed as residing in the poet's affinity with children and in the particular qualities of the child-like personality that is conveyed through his writings. That personality is imaginative, sensitive, at home among common things yet possessing a strong sense of the preternatural and the profound. The imaginative child, daydreaming in solitude, is somehow much closer to the true and essential nature of creativity and the inexhaustible wellsprings of inspiration than the customary lives of most adults ever allow, he suggests.

In discussing Beatrix Potter's reading material as a child in the essay "Peter Rabbit, Beatrix Potter and Friends" (published originally in The New York Times of 1952),²⁴ de la Mare mentions that her principal childhood

companions were more than simply her books and little animals; she also, "in excelsis, ... had the images and creations of her own mind's making which no one could deprive her of, that 'kingdom' - for so many children who are never less alone than when alone - called the Imagination".²⁵ It is significant for our purposes that this example draws together the elements of childhood, solitude, creative genius, the imagination, and even dreams; as in the very next sentence de la Mare writes: "Not that Beatrix Potter was a 'dreamer'." But obviously her imaginative use of her solitude classifies her as a kind of dreamer to de la Mare, not in the common derogatory sense, but in the complimentary sense in which he himself is a dreamer, using the childish way of seeing the world for imaginative purposes, and deriving much strength and wisdom from solitude, in itself a source for his imagination to draw from.

In another essay, entitled "Rupert Brooke and the Intellectual Imagination", de la Mare's presentation of "the salient characteristics of childhood" depicts children not only as living more intensely but also as closer to the region of dream than adults:

They are not so closely confined and bound in by their groping senses. Facts to them are the liveliest of chameleons. Between their dreams and their actuality looms no impassable abyss. There is no solitude more secluded than a child's, no absorption more complete, no perception more exquisite and, one might even add, more comprehensive. As we strive to look back and to live our own past again, can we recall any joy, fear, hope or disappointment more extreme and more intensely realized than those of childhood, any love more impulsive and unquestioning, and, alas, any boredom so unmitigated and unutterable?

.....

With ... metaphysical riddles ... - riddles which no philosopher has yet wholly answered to anybody's but his own satisfaction - certain children ease the waking moments of their inward reveries. They are contemplatives, solitaries, fakirs, who sink again and again out of the noise and fever of existence into a waking vision....

This broken dream, then, this profound self-communion, this innocent peace and wonder make up the secret existence of a really childlike child: while the intellect is only stirring.

Then, suddenly, life flings open the door of the nursery. A masked harlequin springs out of the wings; and at a touch, the child becomes a boy.... Consciousness from being chiefly subjective becomes largely objective. The steam-engine routs

Faërie. Actuality breaks in upon dream... Yet the child-mind, the child-imagination persists, and, if powerful, never perishes. But here, as it seems to me, is the dividing line.

In de la Mare's poetry, especially that which he writes for children, it is surely this "child-mind, the child-imagination" which dominates, rather than "the boyish type of mind and imagination, the intellectual analytical type".²⁶ What is most interesting, therefore, is not so much de la Mare's comments on what he sees as the boyishness of Brooke's imagination as those which, in describing the contrasting type of poet, are implicitly a comment on himself. The child-like visionary such as Blake, Vaughan and Traherne, all mentioned by de la Mare for their presentation of the "child" rather than the "boy" (or "girl"), may be extended to include de la Mare too, and his comments point us to aspects of his own poetry, especially that written about or for children, and which, characteristically, deal with aspects of the dream or preternatural:

The visionaries, the introverts, those whose eyes are set inward and who delight in the distance, in the beginning and the end, rather than in the assaulting external incidents and excitements of life's journey, have to learn to substantiate their imaginings, to base their fantastic palaces on terra firma, to weave their dreams into the fabric of actuality. But the source and origin of their poetry is in the world within.

.....

... the words of the mystics and the poets of a childlike imagination seem chiefly to mean what is left hinted at, rather than expressed.... Their world, old as Eden and remoter than the Euphrates, lies like the fabric of a vision, bathed in an unearthly atmosphere.... [Whereas Brooke] desired, idolized, delighted in, and praised things-in-themselves, for their energy, vividness and naturalness; they do so for some disturbing yet solacing inward and spiritual significance, and for the reality of which things are the painted veil. They live or at least desire to live in the quietude of their own spirit, in a region of which a certain order of dream seems to be a reminiscence, in a far-away listening, and they are most happy when at peace, if not passive.

The fact that the "child" is in natural association with the world of "dream", while "boyishness" is its antithesis, leads de la Mare to do Brooke an unconscious injustice, so convinced is he that Brooke typifies the "boyish" state of mind. In the body of his essay, de la Mare makes the following comment with regard to Brooke's poetry:

The children in his poems are few. They are all seen objectively, from without; though a wistful childlike longing for peace and home and mother dwells in such a poem as 'Retrospect' or 'A Memory'. I am not sure that the word 'dream' occurs in them at all.

This extract makes it clear that de la Mare expects to find a link made between dream and a longing child. His footnote both explains his mistake and expands on his opinion on the subject; it reads as follows:

To my shame, if not consternation, my friend Sir Edward Marsh has pointed out to me that the word 'dream' occurs in no fewer than fifteen [of Brooke's poems]. Memory may be a brazen dissembler and this, I hope, will be one more salutary lesson that general impressions are none the worse for being put to a close test. Still, the fact that the peculiar, dreamlike quality and atmosphere which is so prevalent in the poetry of the visionaries is rarely present in Rupert Brooke's will not, I think, be gainsaid.²⁷

Certainly, we notice that de la Mare's own poetry possesses this requirement of a "peculiar, dreamlike quality and atmosphere", which even pervades many of his short stories. He is thus a "visionary poet", at least by his own criteria.

We have seen, so far, how closely linked for de la Mare are the worlds of childhood and poetic inspiration. Such inspiration may also be to some extent evoked through a state of mind in tune with the best of childish things. During the rest of this chapter I hope to illustrate how de la Mare's finest lyric gifts find their expression in his poetry for children. The poems to be discussed in this section will be chosen from successive volumes of de la Mare's verse, following the order in which the collections were published, rather than by any other principle of selection. It is hoped by taking this approach that something of the cumulative nature and flavour not simply of individual poems but of the poems as part of a distinct collection will also emerge.

De la Mare's very first collection of poetry Songs of Childhood, published in 1902, shows how his interest in the other world also culminates in his writing for children, as children's literature provides him with the ideal opportunity for using fairy material. Several poems in this collection

tell fairy stories of various kinds; among them is "The Three Beggars" (CP, pp. 12-13). Here, the three beggars indicated by the title are confronted by "a fairy-child / In crimson mantle muffled", who requires of them something in exchange for "fairy kisses three". Having sacrificed to her their last edible morsel, they are duly rewarded:

That changeling, lean and icy-lipped,
Touched crust, and bone, and goat, and lo!
Beneath her finger taper-tipped
The magic all ran through.

Instead of crust a peacock pie,
Instead of bone sweet venison.
Instead of goat a white lily
With seven blooms thereon.

And each fair cup was deep with wine:
Such was the changeling's charity
The sweet feast was enough for nine,
But not too much for three.

Far from being evil or malicious, this changeling is presented as generous and well-intentioned. An interesting aspect of this poem, which appears at first to deal only with fairy-lore, is its mention, five times, of St Ann; so that one comes to the conclusion that the Christian saint is cooperating with the fairies:

There, in the daybreak gold and wild,
Each merry-hearted beggar man
Drank deep unto the fairy-child,
And blessed the good St. Ann.

This poem illustrates the ease with which de la Mare makes the transition between the realms of Faerie and Christianity. That faith and imagination are required on the part of the devotee of each world, has been discussed at some length in Chapter One.²⁸ However, children's writing is a place of particular appropriateness for the blending of these disparate strands. Children are less critical, on the whole, of the admixture of myths from different traditions, less insistent on demarcations according to source. And the straying adult reader, remembering this, adjusts his perceptions accordingly. The world of the preternatural is, after all, conventionally at

home in children's books; and the Christian world may be gently interposed to good effect, especially in terms of its morals and messages. As in the play Crossings, where the singing of a hymn in which the name of Jesus is mentioned causes all the fairies to disappear,²⁹ so here in a poem, "The Ogre" (CP, pp. 18-20), Christ's power is presented as vastly superior to any other, and recognized as such in the underworld.

In this poem, while two children are innocently sleeping, they are in fact menaced by an ogre:

Into their dreams no shadow fell
Of his disastrous thumb
Groping discreet, and gradual,
Across the quiet room.

The force that stays him is the power of the name of Jesus, while the sweetly singing mother is not even actively aware of any specific threat to her children at that moment. She is praying for protection for them in a more general way, but her song reveals her belief in the realms of both Faerie and Christ, as well as her assurance of the latter's greater power:

But scarce his nail had scraped the cot
Wherein these children lay,
As if his malice were forgot,
It suddenly did stay.

But faintly in the ingle-nook
He heard a cradle-song,
That rose into his thoughts and woke
Terror them among.

For she who in the kitchen sat
Darning by the fire,
Guileless of what he would be at,
Sang sweet as wind or wire: -

'Lullay, thou little tiny child
By-by, lullay, lullie;
Jesu in glory, meek and mild,
This night remember thee!

'Fiend, witch, and goblin, foul and wild,
He deems them smoke to be;
Lullay, thou little tiny child,
By-by, lullay lullie!'

The Ogre lifted up his eyes
 Into the moon's pale ray,
 And gazed upon her leopard-wise,
 Cruel and clear as day;

He snarled in gluttony and fear -
 The wind blows dismally -
 'Jesu in storm my lambs be near,
 By-by, lullay, lullie!'

And like a ravenous beast which sees
 The hunter's icy eye,
 So did this wretch in wrath confess
 Sweet Jesu's mastery.

The outcome of the poem endorses the mother's faith that Christ's mastery is over all.

Two allegorical poems which also have religious overtones tinged with the preternatural are "The Pedlar" (CP, pp. 14-15) and "The Pilgrim" (CP, pp. 24-26). Both poems present a tempted character; in the first case, it is a pedlar with sweet and pretty goods tempting golden-haired Lettice, "from her lattice looking down"; and in "The Pilgrim", a weary old man is confronted by three fiends. His conflict with them appears to be the externalization of his inner struggle. In "The Pedlar", Lettice yields to the traveller's temptation by exchanging one of her golden locks for his goods, and pines away; the pilgrim, on the other hand, withstands the luring of the fiends (who try to persuade him to "[c]urse the dream that lures [him]"), and as a result is rewarded with heavenly help and a safe homecoming:

'.....
 Cheat me not with false beguiling -
 Beseech ye, begone!'

And even as he spake, on high
 Arrows of sunlight pierced the sky.
 Bright streamed the rain. O'er burning snow
 From hill to hill a wondrous Bow
 Of colour and fire trembled in the air,
 Painting its heavenly beauty there.

Wild flung each Fiend a batlike hood
 Against that flaming light, and stood
 Beating the windless rain and then
 Rose heavy and slow with cowering head,
 Circled in company again,
 And into darkness fled.

Marvellous sweet it was to hear
 The waters gushing loud and clear;
 Marvellous happy it was to be
 Alone, and yet not solitary;
 Oh, out of terror and dark to come
 In sight of home!

The pilgrim is shown to be the victor receiving due blessing for his resistance to the fiends' wiles.

Other poems, perhaps more accessible and immediate to children themselves, present delightful encounters between child characters and preternatural figures, such as dwarves, fairies and witches. One such is "The Dwarf" (CP, pp. 23-24), although the encounter here is delightful only to Jinnie who laughs so much, "t'was as much as she could / To keep from cracking her sides, her sides, / To keep from cracking her sides". The poem becomes stranger as the dwarf becomes more openly offended:

He threw a pumpkin over the wall,
 And melons and apples beside,
 So thick in the air that to see 'em all fall,
 She laughed, and laughed, till she cried, cried, cried,
 Jane laughed and laughed till she cried.

Down fell her teardrops a pit-apat-pat,
 And red as a rose she grew: -
 'Kah! kah!' said the dwarf, 'is it crying you're at?
 It's the very worst thing you could do, do, do,
 It's the very worst' thing you could do.'

He slipped like a monkey up into a tree,
 He shook her down cherries like rain;
 'See now,' says he, cheeping, 'a blackbird I be,
 Laugh, laugh, little Jinnie, again-gain-gain,
 Laugh, laugh, little Jinnie, again!'

Ah me! what a strange, what a gladsome duet
 From a house in the deeps of a wood!
 Such shrill and such harsh voices never met yet
 A-laughing as loud as they could, could, could,
 A-laughing as loud as they could.

Come Jinnie, come dwarf, cocksparrow, and bee,
 There's a ring gaudy-green in the dell,
 Sing, sing, ye sweet cherubs, that flit in the tree;
 La! who can draw tears from a well, well, well,
 Who ever drew tears from a well!

The poem at first echoes the uncontrollable, side-splitting effect the dwarf has on the little girl, becoming progressively more weird and even eerie,

until the final two stanzas present one with a stark contrast between their "A-laughing as loud as they could" and the rather perplexing, somewhat tear-ridden riddle with which the poem ends.

There are several poems in this collection about fairies and witches in which de la Mare appears to be deliberately blurring the distinction between the real and the imagined. A child reading or being read these poems would thus be introduced to the possible discrepancies between subjectivity and actuality, and yet the subjective reality, for all its being exposed as such, is nonetheless the one that has staying power and grips the imagination. In "I Saw Three Witches" (CP, p. 8), for instance, the realization that the witches are in fact, in actuality, "bushes in scarlet bud", only emerges in the final line of the poem. A question mark remains above the experiences presented in the previous three stanzas: were these illusory too?

I saw three witches
That bowed down like barley,
And took to their brooms 'neath a louring sky,
And, mounting a storm-cloud,
Aloft on its margin,
Stood black in the silver as up they did fly.

I saw three witches
That mocked the poor sparrows
They carried in cages of wicker along,
Till a hawk from his eyrie
Swooped down like an arrow,
And smote on the cages, and ended their song.

I saw three witches
That sailed in the shallop
All turning their heads with a truculent smile
Till a bank of green osiers
Concealed their grim faces,
Though I heard them lamenting for many a mile.

I saw three witches
Asleep in a valley,
Their heads in a row, like stones in a flood,
Till the moon, creeping upward,
Looked white through the valley,
And turned them to bushes in bright scarlet bud.

Is it possible to convert into actuality the speaker's experience of seeing the witches fly on their broomsticks, mock the sparrows, or sail in a shallop; as the fourth experience, that of seeing "three witches asleep in a valley",

is finally converted into something more "ordinary"? De la Mare leaves it to the individual reader, child or adult, to decide. The boundary between dream, the preternatural and actuality is deliberately blurred.

The title of a volume of poetry to be discussed later on in this chapter³⁰ is first used by de la Mare as a title to one of the fairy poems in Songs of Childhood, "Down-Adown-Derry" (CP, pp. 29-30). As in "The Phantom" (CP, pp. 33-35) and "The Double" (CP, p. 259),³¹ so in "Down-Adown-Derry", it is a little girl (in this case Annie Maroon), engaged in a relaxed, potentially creative, imaginative exercise, who has the preternatural experience. She is "[g]athering daisies / In the meadows of Doone", and it is while doing this that she

Sees a white fairy
Skip buxom and free
Where the waters go brawling
In rills to the sea;
Singing down-adown-derry.

The relationship to the fairy develops gradually: Annie sees her first - presumably unintentionally; in the second stanza we are told that she "[p]leeps softly", which suggests an active interest. After the description of the fairy provided in the third stanza, her invitation in song is presented in stanzas four and five:

'Down-adown-derry,
And shrill was her tune: -
'Come to my water-house,
Annie Maroon,
Come in your dimity,
Ribbon on head,
To wear siller seaweed
And coral instead;
Singing down-adown-derry.'

'Down-adown-derry,
Lean fish of the sea,
Bring lanthorns for feasting
The gay Faërie;
'Tis sand for the dancing,
A music all sweet
In the water-green gloaming
For thistledown feet;
Singing down-adown-derry.'

In stanza six Annie Maroon is said to have "[l]ooked large on the fairy" and in the following stanza we find her emotionally entangled. This climactic stanza (the seventh) also presents the disappearance of Annie Maroon:

'Down-adown-derry,'
Sang the Fairy of Doone,
Piercing the heart
Of sweet Annie Maroon;
And lo! when like roses
The clouds of the sun
Faded at dusk, gone
Was Annie Maroon;
Singing down-adown-derry.

The final two stanzas leave us with the sad picture of a "father forlorn" who

may call o'er the water,
Cry - cry through the Mill,
But Annie Maroon, alas!
Answer ne'er will;
Singing down-adown-derry.

The phrase "Singing down-adown-derry" seems to echo the tone of each stanza, so that towards the end of the poem the light-heartedness it originally evoked as it seemed to enhance the relaxed fairy spirit of the earlier parts of the poem has become more and more veiled under the cloud of the father's longing, nostalgia, and uncertainty. The final tone is one of intense mystery and a certain ambiguity. As in Crossings: A Fairy Play, de la Mare here too conveys the sense of potential evil or danger in the activities of fairies through the contrast of unrelenting rhythms and the sadness or loneliness felt by those left behind, victims who remain attached to the vanished child. The difference is that in Crossings, the later work, Ann is returned through the power of Christ's name.

The final poem in Songs of Childhood to be discussed is "The Phantom" (CP, pp. 33-35),³² a poem in which another little girl, again a typically imaginative child, has a preternatural experience: this time not of Faerie but of the ghostly realm beyond death. Her imaginative aspect is suggested in the description of her state of mind, presumably after reading her book of fairy tales referred to in the final stanza of the poem ("her fairy book"):

"Her eyes are yet with visions bright / Of sylph and river, flower and fay". She is visiting her grandmother in the latter's vast, empty old house and is sent upstairs to fetch a Bible, to which her grandmother refers as the book which "'on many a sea / Hath stilled the waves' alarm!'" This observation could be regarded as pious or superstitious; and, in the latter case, as heightening the already loaded atmosphere experienced by the receptive child.

To begin with, Ann is frightened by the unfamiliar environment and strange sounds. In the stanzas quoted below, de la Mare skilfully creates a sense of the tension between Ann's fear and the beauty of the experience awaiting her.

Ann scarce can hear or breathe, so fast
Her pent-up heart doth beat,
When, faint along the corridor,
She hears the fall of feet: -

Sounds lighter than silk slippers make
Upon a ballroom floor, when sweet
Violin and 'cello wake
Music for twirling feet.

O! in an old unfriendly house,
What shapes may not conceal
Their faces in the open day,
At night abroad to steal!

Even her taper seems with fear
To languish small and blue;
Far in the woods the winter wind
Runs whistling through.

At first the intense stress felt by Ann is depicted, contrasting with the lightness suggested by the stanza following it. Thereafter it is again Ann's state of fearfulness which is depicted, this time by the externalizing of her feelings in the description of the "old unfriendly house" and her candle seeming "with fear / To languish small and blue".

The tension between the fears felt by Ann and the joyous nature of the reward awaiting her in the region of perception she is about to enter culminates in the stanza quoted below:

A dreadful cold plucks at each hair,
Her mouth is stretched to cry,
But sudden, with a gush of joy,
It narrows to a sigh.

The third line in this stanza, "But sudden, with a gush of joy," provides the turning-point, and from now on, Ann's awareness of the totally unthreatening nature of her preternatural encounter creates a quietly joyous and serene sense in her and throughout the rest of the poem. She meets an equally lonely and (perhaps therefore) a genuine companion:

'Tis but a phantom child which comes
Soft through the corridor,
Singing an old forgotten song,
This ancient burden bore: -

'Thorn, thorn, I wis,
And roses twain,
A red rose and a white;
Stoop in the blossom, bee, and kiss
A lonely child good-night.

'Swim fish, sing bird,
And sigh again,
I that am lost am lone,
Bee in the blossom never stirred
Locks hid beneath a stone!' -

Her eyes were of the azure fire
That hovers in wintry flame;
Her raiment wild and yellow as furze
That spouteth out the same;

And in her hand she bore no flower,
But on her head a wreath
Of faded flowers that did yet
Smell sweetly after death....

Gloomy with night the listening walls
Are now that she is gone,
Albeit this solitary child
No longer seems alone.

Fast though her taper dwindles down,
Though black the shadows come,
A beauty beyond fear to dim
Haunts now her alien home.

Ghosts in the world, malignant, grim,
Vex many a wood and glen,
And house and pool, - the unquiet ghosts
Of dead and restless men.

But in her grannie's house this spirit -
A child as lone as she -
Pining for love not found on earth,
Ann dreams again to see.

Seated upon her tapestry-stool,
 Her fairy-book laid by,
 She gazes into the fire, knowing
 She hath sweet company.

It is this inner faith of "knowing / She hath sweet company" that lends the poem its affirmative quality. The longing for the unattainable, "Pining for love not found on earth", exhibited by this phantom child, is implicitly shared by Ann, who "dreams" to see this child again. But even though we are not presented with the realization of this particular wish in the poem, we do find Ann inwardly transformed, having absorbed into herself a vision such as she formerly derived from her fairy-book, upon which she is no longer dependent, and she now contains the riches of the realm beyond, within herself.

The most central book of children's poetry by de la Mare in the context of this study is Peacock Pie: A Book of Rhymes, published in 1913; not only in terms of its connectedness to the worlds of Lear and Carroll as mentioned earlier in this chapter,³³ but also the way in which it features various levels of perception ranging from the ordinary to the preternatural, as suggested in the opening paragraph of this chapter.³⁴

A few pages of poetry taken in sequence almost anywhere from this collection illustrate the point made regarding the varying levels of perception and perhaps even realms of reality or kinds of truth featured not only in Peacock Pie but throughout de la Mare's work. "Summer Evening" (CP, p. 174), for instance, a short poem, simply depicts what its title suggests, in a homely enough way. Its final line reads quietly as follows: "Gone is another summer's day." "Earth Folk" (CP, p. 174), the eight-line poem which follows it, is more evocative, imaginative, and bordering on the preternatural, turning the surroundings of the earth into something like a fairyland:

The cat she walks on padded claws,
 The wolf on the hills lays stealthy paws,
 Feathered birds in the rain-sweet sky
 At their ease in the air, flit low, flit high.

The oak's blind, tender roots pierce deep,
 His green crest towers, dimmed in sleep,
 Under the stars whose thrones are set
 Where never prince hath journeyed yet.

Here indeed the reader is invited to venture beyond the bounds of the familiar. Natural objects are described in the first six lines, but in a mysterious, atmospherically charged way, preparing the reader for the departure from the norm in the final two lines. We note the connection between the oak's extraordinary state and its condition of "sleep". "At the Keyhole" (CP, pp. 174-75), the next in sequence, contains hints of the extraordinary in the familiar. The scene is ostensibly very homely: the cobbler wants Sue to grill him some bones. But we gradually perceive that it is the eeriness of his surroundings making him almost desperate for Sue's simple, homely remedy: "'I saw an eye at the keyhole, Susie! - / Grill me some bones!'"

"The Old Stone House" (CP, p. 175), immediately following "At the Keyhole", is a child's account of the eeriness of an old house, and these two poems are in turn followed by a series of poems which directly introduce their preternatural subjects.³⁵ I shall now look in detail at some of these as well as at various other poems in Peacock Pie in terms of their representative value in dealing in worlds of - if not nonsense, then - weirdness in relation to actuality. The nonsense of Lear, the dream world of Carroll, and the strangeness in the familiar of de la Mare which is easily transformed into the preternatural, are all related. The poems chosen for further discussion from this collection are therefore some of those in which aspects of dream and the preternatural appear to dominate. This is often partly because they are seen from a child's point of view.

A child's view of death is presented in both "Tillie" (CP, pp. 143-44) and "Jim Jay" (CP, p. 145) where, although the speaker is not specified, the child's vision is appropriated by him. In these cases, the child's fresh, original perception of a relatively ordinary occurrence, someone's death, turns it into something very strange. The total absence of sentimentality regarding death and a certain matter-of-fact tone in the face of what could

easily be considered eerie by those accustomed to view things that way, are apparent in both poems. "Tillie" reads as follows:

Old Tillie Turveycombe
 Sat to sew,
 Just where a patch of fern did grow;
 There, as she yawned,
 And yawn wide did she,
 Floated some seed
 Down her gull-e-t;
 And look you once,
 And look you twice,
 Poor old Tillie
 Was gone in a trice.
 But oh, when the wind
 Do a-moaning come,
 'Tis poor old Tillie
 Sick for home;
 And oh, when a voice
 In the mist do sigh,
 Old Tillie Turveycombe's
 Floating by.

This poem contains an unquestioning, unsurprised acceptance of ghosts, which suggests a child's ease in marrying this world with the next. The perhaps artificial division between actuality and dream has not yet been enforced.

"Jim Jay" is an even stranger poem, where the conventional assumptions regarding the nature of time are implicitly overthrown by the speaker's unexpected (child-like) response to death, which is depicted in an extended image of the strange contortions made by time in the relations of the living to the dead. The dying person's deprivation of an earthly future is depicted in terms of his getting "stuck fast / In Yesterday":

Do diddle di do,
 Poor Jim Jay
 Got stuck fast
 In Yesterday.
 Squinting he was,
 On cross-legs bent,
 Never heeding
 The wind was spent.
 Round veered the weathercock,
 The sun drew in -
 And stuck was Jim
 Like a rusty pin....
 We pulled and we pulled
 From seven till twelve,
 Jim, too frightened
 To help himself.

But all in vain.
 The clock struck one,
 And there was Jim
 A little bit gone.
 At half-past five
 You scarce could see
 A glimpse of his flapping
 Handkerchee.
 And when came noon,
 And we climbed sky-high,
 Jim was a speck
 Slip - slipping by.
 Come to-morrow,
 The neighbours say,
 He'll be past crying for:
 Poor Jim Jay.

The matter-of-factness here is evident in the details provided of Jim's squinting; of his "cross-legs bent"; of the simile comparing him to "a rusty pin". Childish energy, perseverance and again lack of sentimentality are indicated in the lines "We pulled and we pulled / From seven till twelve". The mystery increases towards the end of the poem when the speaker claims to have "climbed sky-high" (the assonance here emphasizes the impression of space and height) and a sense of awe and wonder is implied in the lines "Jim was a speck / Slip - slipping by". The end of the poem shows an almost brutal acceptance of what "the neighbours say" regarding the short-lived grief required by the mysterious disappearance of "Poor Jim Jay".

"Mrs. Earth" (CP, p. 138) and "Hide and Seek" (CP, p. 147), both with titles appropriate to the world of childhood, each conveys an appealing dream consciousness. "Mrs. Earth" presents a defiant attitude, presumably brought about by the child speaker's commitment to realms of thinking and dreaming:

But Mrs. Earth can change my dreams
 No more than ruby or gold.
 Mrs. Earth and Mr. Sun
 Can tan my skin, and tire my toes,
 But all that I'm thinking of, ever shall think,
 Why, neither knows.

"Hide and Seek" depicts the game between wind and wood, cloud and star, and ends with the child speaker presenting his or her own situation, which shows a healthy relationship to the self as well as a sense of the continuity of dream in sleep and waking actuality:

Hide and seek, say I,
 To myself, and step
 Out of the dream of Wake
 Into the dream of Sleep.

Both these poems present children who have a healthy assurance that their own identity resides essentially in their imaginative conceptions of themselves and their world. They are thus unthreatened by the impinging world of actuality (as represented by "Mrs. Earth and Mr. Sun") or by transitions between waking and sleeping. The "dream", which in their case means their innermost perceptions, is what is essential to them both.

"The Lost Shoe" (CP, pp. 151-52) is a poem of a rather different kind, presenting a little girl's fate from an impersonal perspective. In its increasing strangeness, bordering at last almost on the uncanny, it appears to capture something of the spirit of this anthology. It becomes progressively more fairy-tale-like as the poem continues. At first the impersonal narrator presents the facts of the situation:

Poor little Lucy
 By some mischance,
 Lost her shoe
 As she did dance:
 'Twas not on the stairs,
 Not in the hall;
 Not where they sat
 At supper at all.

But as the crying in "French, Dutch, Latin / And Portuguese" proves unsuccessful in retrieving Lucy's shoe, the search is continued even more dramatically:

Ships the dark seas
 Went plunging through,
 But none brought news
 Of Lucy's shoe;
 And still she patters,
 In silk and leather
 Snow, sand, shingle,
 In every weather;
 Spain, and Africa,
 Hindustan,
 Java, China,
 And lamped Japan,
 Plain and desert,
 She hops - hops through,

Pernambuco
 To gold Peru;
 Mountain and forest,
 And river too,
 All the world over
 For her lost shoe.

Like many of de la Mare's novels, short stories and poems, this poem too begins with an ordinary experience which then becomes transformed into something strange, mysterious, other-worldly. The feeling the reader is left with here is a curious mixture: a sense of the extravagant geography of the search, combined with that of strangeness and sadness as Lucy continues her seemingly unattainable quest.

"The Truants" (CP, p. 152), which immediately follows "The Lost Shoe", is the ostensibly unlikely title of a poem on the subject of "the hosts", "the legions of children / Magic hath stolen away". One is not certain whether to be sorry for the speaker and the children, or only for the speaker and the others who have lost children to magic. The power of magic is evident, but whether the children experience it as good or evil is not clear:

The waves tossing surf in the moonbeam,
 The Albatross lone on the spray,
 Alone knows the tears wept in vain for the children
 Magic hath stolen away.

In vain: for at hush of the evening,
 When the stars twinkle into the grey,
 Seems to echo the far-away calling of children
 Magic hath stolen away.

The phrase "In vain" clearly indicates the sense of loss and sorrow on the speaker's part but the seeming echo of "the far-away calling of children" remains ambivalent in its import. Is it only the speaker's imaginings, or are the children perhaps truly yearning for earth's pleasures? The point of view is presumably that of an adult and one cannot be sure of the real situation of the children: whether they are happy or sad to be in the land of magic. The title would appear to suggest a form of active participation on their part.

Another, no less innocuous activity associated with fairies, besides that of enchanting (or kidnapping) children, is that of exchanging human children for their own less attractive offspring, then known as a changeling. De la

Mare has written several poems with the result of this aspect of fairy behaviour as theme.³⁷

"Peak and Puke" (CP, p. 176) is again written from a child's perspective, as are so many of de la Mare's poems for children; and as is frequently the case, especially in Peacock Pie, the child's perspective is depicted as a rather harsh one:³⁶

From his cradle in the glamourie
They have stolen my wee brother,
Housed a changeling in his swaddlings
For to fret my own poor mother.
Pules it in the candle light
Wi' a cheek so lean and white,
Chinkling up its eyne so wee
Wailing shrill at her an' me.
It we'll neither rock nor tend
Till the Silent Silent send,
Lapping in their waesome arms
Him they stole with spells and charms,
Till they take this changeling creature
Back to its own fairy nature -
Cry! Cry! as long as may be,
Ye shall ne'er be woman's baby!

The process by which a changeling is found in a human household is made clear by this child speaker who does not attempt to disguise his feelings of hostility towards this "changeling creature" who "[p]ules ... in the candle light ... / Wailing shrill": "They have stolen my wee brother, / ... Him they stole with spells and charms". The "Silent" are clearly the Silent Folk or the fairy folk who are responsible for the child-theft of which the child speaker in "Peak and Puke" is complaining so bitterly. The child is quite lucid about the reality of this changeling's nature, as he refers to "its own fairy nature", and with a complete lack of sympathy points out that it is impossible for the changeling ever to leave its fairy nature behind to become "woman's baby". Of course, differently seen, the poem may also reflect a child's ordinary jealousy and sibling rivalry.

The unflattering picture of a changeling baby presented by the child speaker in "Peak and Puke" makes way for a seductive portrait of a female changeling in the poem immediately following "Peak and Puke" in Peacock Pie,

called simply "The Changeling" (CP, pp. 176-77). The changeling in this poem corresponds more perhaps to the traditional view of a mermaid than a changeling, but de la Mare is indubitably depicting this alluring female being as a changeling, perhaps again to emphasize the apparently, and often genuine, beauty and charm of these fairy beings. The repetition of "Ahoy, and ahoy!" throughout the poem eventually enchants the reader, as it no doubt does the "[y]oung man of the ferry". The cadences are rhythmic and lyrical, and the dreamy state of the changeling's victim, as he is darkly hinted to be, is emphasized:

'Ahoy, and ahoy!'
 'Twixt mocking and merry -
 'Ahoy and ahoy, there,
 Young man of the ferry!'

She stood on the steps
 In the watery gloom -
 That Changeling - 'Ahoy, there!'
 She called him to come.
 He came on the green wave,
 He came on the grey,
 Where stooped that sweet lady
 That still summer's day.

He fell in a dream
 Of her beautiful face,
 As she sat on the thwart
 And smiled in her place.
 No echo his oar woke,
 Float silent did they,
 Past low-grazing cattle
 In the sweet of the hay.
 And still in a dream
 At her beauty sat he,
 Drifting stern foremost
 Down - down to the sea.
 Come you, then: call,
 When the twilight apace
 Brings shadow to brood
 On the loveliest face;
 You shall hear o'er the water
 Ring faint in the grey -
 'Ahoy, and ahoy, there!'
 And tremble away;
 'Ahoy, and ahoy! ...'
 And tremble away.

De la Mare is skilful at using different rhythms to evoke the nuances surrounding the experience of being allured, and perhaps ultimately deceived,

by the preternatural beings which haunt the other world and enter this one through man's imagination. The provocative effect created by the use of short vowel sounds in "'Twixt mocking and merry -", for instance, enhances one's sense of the taunting, teasing aspect of the changeling. The references to her beauty, on the other hand, where long vowel sounds are used, have an almost mesmerizing effect as one becomes drawn into the spell experienced by the young man.

It is interesting to note that Peacock Pie contains a whole cluster of poems following on from one another which have as theme the evil or darker side of the preternatural beings who people these works. Firstly, "The Ride-by-Nights" (CP, pp. 175-76) has as subject witches, who hover on the brink of the preternatural, as discussed in Chapter One, and are clearly embroiled in evil, certainly when they are "[c]rooked and black" as in this case.³⁸ Secondly, neither "Peak and Puke" nor the poem next in sequence, "The Changeling", both discussed above, presents a flattering picture of fairy beings, even if the changeling temptress is beautiful and enchanting. These two poems are followed by "The Mocking Fairy" (CP, p. 177) which features the audacious, malignant tauntress of "poor old Mrs. Gill"; then comes "Bewitched" (CP, p. 178), showing up the deeds of "a lady of witchcraft"; and finally, "The Honey Robbers" (CP, pp. 178-79), in which two fairies are guilty of a fairly innocent theft.³⁹ This group of poems featuring fairy beings or humans in touch with the dark side of the preternatural highlights the fascination for de la Mare of the realm of the preternatural as a whole. He does not express this interest through flights of fancy into regions of sentimentally idealized goodness, but explores this realm of the human imagination by not omitting its sinister, darker aspects, however positive his appraisal of the whole.

As many of the other dream and fairy poems in this collection have been discussed or mentioned earlier on in this study, it remains here to make a few concluding remarks in relation to some of the last poems in Peacock Pie, which include the "Song of Soldiers" (CP, pp. 184-85), "Dream-Song" (CP, p. 186) and the famous "Song of the Mad Prince" (CP, p. 187), which lends the collection its title.

"The Song of Soldiers" presumably presents a young boy's reverie. The dream frame is introduced in the first line and reinforced at the opening of each of the three stanzas, which all begin, "As I sat musing" It is the nature of the vision, rather than the tone, presentation, or vocabulary which suggests that the speaker is a boy. It is first "one man marching with a bright steel pike, / Marching in the dayshine like a ghost ..." that the speaker sees; then "Rank on rank of ghostly soldiers marching o'er the fen, / Marching in the misty air they showed in dreams to me"; and finally:

... 'twas a host in dark array,
With their horses and their cannon wheeling onward to the fray,
Moving like a shadow to the fate the brave must dree,
And behind me roared the drums, rang the trumpets of the sea.

The symmetrical structure of this poem makes full use of cumulative effects as the speaker's perception of the backdrop of the sea presented in the final line of each stanza changes in a way which parallels his growing vision. In the opening stanza "the moaning and the murmur of the sea" are referred to; in the second, it is "the shouting and the shattering of the sea" which supports the speaker's vision; and finally, the sea becomes an army orchestra. Presumably, then, the sea is the origin of this vision.

"Dream-Song" starts with the contrasting of various natural lights but becomes progressively more strange until the final stanza introduces preternatural "[e]lf-light":

And a small face smiling
In a dream's beguiling
In a world of wonders far away.

The poem significantly contains no finite verb as it is presenting a series of dream impressions which become more unearthly as the poem progresses.

"The Song of the Mad Prince" clearly derives from Hamlet but this realization does not solve the riddles it presents. It remains tantalizing and evocative. The crazed prince implicitly presents one of the truths occasionally encountered in dream: in death "'eve's loveliness'" and "'[a]ll Time's delight'" may be found; "'[l]ife's troubled bubble broken'".

Even "The Song of Finis" (CP, p. 188), following "The Song of the Mad Prince", presents a kind of dream vision. This is indicated by phrases such as "At the edge of All the Ages", "His soul from sorrow freed", "a face of skin and bone", "Charged ... into Space" - all these suggest timelessness, infinity, a suspension in the course of life; in short, a dream reality, but connected to death; thus adding a further, sombre dimension at the volume's close.

Similar patterns emerge in another interesting collection, Down-Adown-Derry: A Book of Fairy Poems, published in 1922. It consists of only five poems, an effort by de la Mare to offer one aspect of the preternatural world, that of Faerie, to the young; as in Come Hither, here perhaps too to "the young of all ages", as the language used seems rather advanced and suggests that the poetry is perhaps equally designed for an adult audience, at least in its profounder resonances.

The first poem in the collection is decidedly childlike. It presents a child's vision of her own fairy ghost and is appropriately called "The Double" (CP, p. 259). A little dancing girl perceives her shadow self dancing too and then regrets not being able to see her ghost again; but only after a careful description of her fairy self has been given in the second stanza:

I curtseyed to the dovecote,
 I curtseyed to the well.
 I twirled me round and round about,
 The morning scents to smell.
 When out I came from spinning so,
 Lo, betwixt green and blue
 Was the ghost of me - a fairy child -
 A-dancing - dancing, too.

Nought was of her wearing
 That is the earth's array.
 Her thistledown feet beat airy fleet,
 Yet set no blade astray.

The gossamer shining dew of June
 Showed grey against the green;
 Yet never so much as a bird-claw print
 Of footfall to be seen.

Fading in the mounting sun,
 That image soon did pine.
 Fainter than moonlight thinned the locks
 That shone as clear as mine.
 Vanished! Vanished! O, sad it is
 To spin and spin - in vain;
 And never to see the ghost of me
 A-dancing there again.

The metre is predominantly iambic trimeter and tetrameter, with initial trochees in lines 6, 9, 17, 19 and 21. The trochees in lines 6 and 9 draw our attention to the appearance of the fairy: "Lo, betwixt green and blue ..." and "Nought was of her wearing ..." The emphases in the final stanza are to rather more poignant effect: "Fading ..." "Fainter ...", "Vanished! Vanished!" This little poem is constructed according to a perfect symmetry: the first and last four lines present us with only the little girl, first her joyous solitary dancing, finally her lonely dancing, as she yearns for the now vanished fairy ghost. It is lines 5 to 8 that present us with the first view of the fairy and lines 17 to 20 that depict her disappearance. The central stanza, as previously mentioned, focuses attention on the magical properties of the fairy herself. This is a poem which demonstrates the proximity of Faerie to the world of imaginative children, clearly represented by this little girl who curtsseys "to the dovecote" and "to the well" and twirls herself "round and round about, / The morning scents to smell". Again, as in "The Phantom",⁴⁰ de la Mare convinces the reader of the imaginative powers of the child before presenting her preternatural experience.

The second poem in the collection, suggestively entitled "The Stranger" (CP, pp. 259-60), tells us nothing about the stranger until the final stanza. The long, dense lines of description in the first three stanzas present "A lone pool, a pool grass-fringed, crystal-clear: / Deep, placid, and cool in the sweet of the year", and its surroundings, "the nook of a wood". The final stanza does not disrupt the brooding atmosphere but adds an alluring preternatural tinge to it:

That is all. Save that one long, sweet, June night-tide
straying,
 The harsh hemlock's pale umbelliferous bloom
 Tenting nook, dense with fragrance and secret with gloom,
 In a beaming of moon-coloured light faintly raying,
 On buds orb'd with dew phosphorescently playing,
 Came a Stranger - still-footed, feat-fingered, clear face,
 Unhumanly lovely ... and supped in that place.

The final phrase " ... and supped in that place" seals the poem in a most natural, homely and familiar way. It is as though de la Mare decides to introduce - after what a child may find to be rather daunting descriptive verse - the feeling that fairies and other beautiful beings from the world of beyond condescend to perform the most ordinary functions here with us ("in that place"), thus bestowing on our earth and our daily human habits, such as eating, a magical grace.

"The Enchanted Hill" (CP, pp. 260-61) begins and ends not with an "enchanted hill" but with an "empty" one:

From height of noon, remote and still,
 The sun shines on the empty hill.
 No mist, no wind, above, below;
 No living thing strays to and fro.

The final two lines, after the description of the preternatural activities which take place nightly, read as follows:

And in strange quiet, shimmering and still,
 Morning enshrines the empty hill.

The central section of this poem has created an atmosphere legitimizing the change connoted by the use of "strange", "shimmering" and "enshrines" in describing the hill which is "empty" by day and "enchanted" by night. The nightly events are introduced with a "But" to highlight the contrast between the deserted aspect of the hill by day and the magic surrounding it by night:

But soon as Night's dark shadows ride
 Across its shrouded Eastern side,
 When at her kindling, clear and full,
 Star beyond star stands visible;
 Then course pale phantoms, fleet-foot deer
 Lap of its waters icy-clear.

Mounts the large moon, and pours her beams
 On bright-fish-flashing, singing streams.
 Voices re-echo. Coursing by,
 Horsemen, like clouds, wheel silently.
 Glide then from out their pitch-black lair
 Beneath the dark's ensilvered arch,
 Witches becowled into the air;
 And iron pine and emerald larch,
 Tents of delight for ravished bird,
 Are by loud music thrilled and stirred.
 Winging the light, with silver feet,
 Beneath their bowers of fragrance met,
 In dells of rose and meadowsweet,
 In mazy dance the fairies flit ...

Yet again, in this poem (as seemed to be a danger in the previous one, "The Stranger"), one feels that the language used might alienate child readers; surely something de la Mare - with his sensitivity to children - was aware of; so that the suggestion made earlier that these poems were written "for the young of all ages" seems reinforced.

The fourth poem in this collection, "The Little Creature" (CP, p. 262), is perhaps the strangest. The title presumably refers to the child speaker whose theme song is "My great grandam - She was a witch"; but may refer to the witch herself who is said to be "pretty and small, / A mere nothing at all". In the first stanza the refrain is interspersed with various references to items associated with a witch's activities; the second describes the grandmother; and in the final one the child speaker presents her own dilemma. As each stanza is so different from the others, it seems worth quoting the poem in its entirety:

Twinkum, twankum, twirlum and twitch -
 My great grandam - She was a Witch;
 Mouse in wainscot, Saint in niche -
 My great grandam - She was a Witch;
 Deadly nightshade flowers in a ditch -
 My great grandam - She was a Witch;
 Long though the shroud, it grows stitch by stitch -
 My great grandam - She was a Witch;
 Wean you weakling before you breech -
 My great grandam - She was a Witch;
 The fattest Pig's but a noble flicht -
 My great grandam - She was a Witch;
 Nightjars rattle, owls scritch -
 My great grandam - She was a Witch.

Pretty and small,
 A mere nothing at all,
 Pinned up sharp in the ghost of a shawl,
 She'd straddle her down to the kirkyard wall,
 And mutter and whisper and call,
 And call

Red blood out and black blood in,
 My Nannie says I'm a child of sin.
 How did I choose me my witchcraft kin?
 Know I as soon as dark's dreams begin
 Snared is my heart in a nightmare's gin;
 Never from terror I out may win;
 So dawn and dusk I pine, peak, thin,
 Scarcely knowing t'other from which -
 My great grandam - She was a Witch.

The first stanza creates a preternatural atmosphere with sinister overtones but is prevented from being entirely sinister by the opening, "Twinkum, twankum, twirlum and twitch -", and the almost playful throwing together of the refrain and a hodge podge of witchly references. The second stanza is featherlight but ends on a hushed note of ominous potential, an effect enhanced by the accumulation of "ands" and the repetition of "call": "And mutter and whisper and call, / And call" The final stanza is perhaps the most complex and for our purposes the most interesting as it presents de la Mare's approximation of a child's point of view when facing the preternatural. The only question in the poem, "How did I choose me my witchcraft kin?", conveys the impression of a child's sense of helplessness in the face of adult perversities, especially of those adults from which it descends. The child is seen as victim: whether of Nannie's superstitions or of genuine evil prompted by the grandmother's witching activities is an open-ended question. But certainly it is a sad picture which the child presents of her inner consciousness, and it is difficult to hold her entirely responsible. Interesting for our purposes too is the fact that the worst terrors emanating from the preternatural world are depicted as powerful, especially in the world of dream: "Know I as soon as dark's dreams begin / Snared is my heart in a nightmare's gin ..."

"The Old King" (CP, p. 263) is a dramatic poem presenting the confrontation of the old king of Cumberland with death - first in his dream, but then in actuality, so that the dream is seen to be a prophetic one, preparing him for the reality of his own death. The ballad stanza form (alternating iambic tetrameters and trimeters rhyming abcb) makes it particularly suitable for children as it is both dramatically immediate and simple. As this old king contemplates what woke him (the opening line of the poem reads "Woke - the old King of Cumberland"), he rejects the possibilities of rats or a "furtive midnight breeze":

'Some keener, stranger, quieter, closer
 Voice it was me woke ...'
 And silence, like a billow, drowned
 The word he spoke.

It is death he now confronts:

Fixed now his stare, for limned in dark,
 Gazing from cowl-like hood,
 Stark in the vague, all-listening night,
 A shadow stood.

Sudden a gigantic hand he thrust
 Into his bosom cold,
 Where now no surging restless beat
 Its long tale told.

Swept on him then, as there he sate,
 Terror icy chill:
 'Twas silence that had him awoke -
 His heart stood still.

No child could fail to respond to the childlikeness of this old king in the face of the great unknown, for which he was prepared by a nightmare: "Alas, alas! - the woeful dream - / The dream that I was in!" So again dream and the preternatural are linked.

Each poem in this cryptic collection thus presents a powerful preternatural experience: firstly, a little dancing girl meets her fairy double; secondly, a fairy stranger is introduced into a wood; thirdly, a seemingly empty hill is revealed as enchanted by night as a result of being

visited by phantoms, fairies and witches; fourthly, a little child presents us with her dilemma in having a witch as a grandmother; and finally, we are presented dramatically with an old king's dream and subsequent death. This little collection illustrates three points: firstly, the blurring of a division between an adult and child audience; secondly, the predominance of the preternatural in de la Mare, revealed by his devoting an entire collection, even if a short one, to this topic; and finally, the skill with which his lyric gifts are used in this area.

Following the collection Down-Adown-Derry is another, simply entitled Poems for Children, which does seem expressly intended for an audience of children. Of the twenty poems offered, both the first and last will be briefly discussed, as they explore in the greatest detail two different aspects of the relationship between the natural and the preternatural. The first deals with a ghostly topic, the final one with Mother Nature and dream.

The first poem, "The O.M.O.R.E." (CP, pp. 265-66), presents a fisherman's legend of four drowning sailors, the O'More brothers, who are believed to haunt the sea:

Swinging their feet through the surge they go,
 Four jolly ghosts in a glimmering row,
 Four abreast, and nodding their heads,
 Walking the waves these ghostly lads,
 Haunting the wind with their voices four,
 Timothy, Patrick, Seumas and Ror -
 Rory O'More.

Striding the sea-drifts leagues from shore,
 Ghosts of his brothers and Rory O'More
 Fishermen white
 In that haze of light
 Dazed with its radiance, see,
 And sigh in a breath,
 Their beards beneath,
 'See! There! - the O.M.O.R.E.!'
 We have seen the O.M.O.R.E.!

The emphasis on the name of Rory creates a playful, humorous effect so that the ghostly appearance of the four brothers is not presented as something uncanny or threatening, but something almost to be looked forward to by the

fishermen. An unconventional impression of "jolly ghosts" is thus conveyed to the reading children.

The final poem, entitled "She in thy Dreams Watch Over Thee!" (CP, p. 274), is not so much on the subject of dreams - as the title would seem to indicate - but on nature, on the "she" of the poem:

She in thy dreams watch over thee!
 Who in the dark and cold
 Keeps all her buds of earth fast-sealed,
 Her meek sheep safe in fold;
 Who comes with dew and goes with dew;
 And lulls the winds to rest;
 And hushes the weary birds of eve
 To silence on her breast.

She of the ages of the night,
 The childhood of the morn,
 Solace the sadness of thy thoughts
 Long waking made forlorn;
 Stoop with the stillness of her smile,
 The safety of her hand,
 Charm with the clear call of her voice,
 Thee, in the shadowy land!

The daisy will unfold in light
 The fairness of her face,
 The lark from his green furrow course
 Back to his sun-wild place;
 Then she whose drowsy cheek by thine
 Lonely all night hath lain,
 Will toss her dark locks from thy sweet eyes,
 Loose thee to earth again!

Sleeping and dreaming are here presented to the child as something natural and healing. Nature is personified as a loving, tender woman whose clear, sweet voice contains charm, who lays her "drowsy cheek" beside a sleeping child, without interrupting the loneliness of sleep, and who has "dark locks" which she has it in her power to remove from the dreamer's eyes when it is her will for him to wake, when she wishes to "[l]oose [him] to earth again". (The dreamer could of course as well be a young girl as a boy.)

In both these pictures a friendly and consoling appearance is given to the "other" world. It is as though de la Mare is wishing to encourage in his child readers a spirit of openness to this world and even the desire to venture further in it.

However, some of the most interesting poems for and about children are in adult collections, or rather, collections predominantly for adults. The Fleeting and Other Poems, published in 1933, contains two such: "Peeping Tom" (CP, pp. 275-77) and "The Slum Child" (CP, pp. 283-85). A poem like "Peeping Tom" is being offered to the more experienced eye of the adult reader to enable him to compare his own attitudes with those of the speaking child. Thus the relative values of adult and child are placed in critical relationship with each other and a new assessment of the importance of the child's view is consequently implied. In this particular poem we are presented with a boy's response to the death of "Miss Emily". The child sees the pall-bearers' legs mount "[l]ike an insect's" and concludes with the question:

But what can Miss Emily
 Want with a box
 So long, narrow, shallow,
 And without any locks?

"The Slum Child" actually contains this complex relationship between the child and adult viewpoints within itself, as it is a form of interior monologue between an adult speaker and his childhood self. Two views of the child's life emerge: we find a contrast between the external circumstances of "evil, and filth, and poverty" and the privileged inner state of the child, source of a paradoxical "well-spring of peace":

O wondrous Life! though plainly I see,
 Thus looking back,
 What evil, and filth, and poverty,
 In childhood harboured me,

And marvel that merciless man could so
 The innocent rack;
 Yet, in bare truth, I also know
 A well-spring of peace did flow,

Secretly blossomed, along that street;
 And - foul-mouthed waif -
 Though I in no wise heeded it
 In the refuse at my feet,

Yet, caged within those spectral bones,
 Aloof and safe,
 Some hidden one made mock of groans,
 Found living bread in stones.

Hence, in this instance, the child is shown as possessing inner resources of healing and joy which contrast with the cruelty emanating from the adult world.

There is an intensifying of the focus on the preternatural in de la Mare's final collection for children, Bells and Grass: A Book of Rhymes (1941), as earlier discussions of some of these poems illustrate. "Pigs" (CP, pp. 435-37) was about the havoc wrought by the vengeful witch and "Never" (CP, p. 443) had as subject the defiant fairy.⁴¹ "Mermaids" (CP, pp. 439-40) is an enchanting poem in which the speaker, "[c]ouched on a wallowing / Dolphin's tail", sails to where he receives the gifts and tunes of the mermaids. An impression of mutual acknowledgement and respect is created. Again, the child reader is encouraged to join the speaker on his voyage into the world of fantasy.

The final poem conveys the evocative and alluring quality of this collection as it entices one to follow the speaker in the faith that one will be able to find that secret world of which he seems to have such an intimate and assured knowledge:

Under the Rose
The Song of the Wanderer

Nobody, nobody told me
 What nobody, nobody knows:
 But now I know where the Rainbow ends,
 I know where there grows
 A Tree that's called the Tree of Life,
 I know where there flows
 The River of All-Forgottenness,
 And where the Lotus blows,
 And I - I've trodden the forest, where
 In flames of gold and rose,
 To burn, and then arise again,
 The Phoenix goes.

Nobody, nobody told me
 What nobody, nobody knows:
 Hide thy face in a veil of light,
 Put on thy silver shoes,
 Thou art the Stranger I know best,
 Thou art the sweet heart, who
 Came from the Land between Wake and Dream,
 Cold with the morning dew.

(CP, p. 450)

The speaker's familiarity with the end of the Rainbow, the Tree of Life and the Stranger from the Land between Wake and Dreams suggests that the desirable facets of the "further reality" are indeed attainable by the imaginative seeker. The profounder resonances of this poem seem as appropriate to adult experience as to that of the child.

On the whole, the evidence of de la Mare's poetry for children reveals the poet as concerned to enrich the child's inner vision, in the service of extending his or her imaginative world. At the same time, he is influencing the adult reader to be more receptive to the increased presence of that "further reality" within his own experience. For, in a certain sense, the child's world can only exist in its fully realized state, or achieve its full importance, within the adult mind: only the adult can adopt a critical awareness of the value of the child's state of mind. At any rate, it is, according to de la Mare, the adult who has the greatest need of its creative influence as a balancing and modifying force in his own, too often mundane, life.

For enriching the imagination of both child and adult, dream and the preternatural serve as ready tools. Dream is inevitably a facet of life with which both children and adults are acquainted, and the preternatural, though further removed from man's daily life, has the power of transporting him beyond its limitations.

This suggestion of a reconciliation or an interleading of the child and adult worlds is a convenient point to begin a summing-up of what I hope has been revealed about the poet and his concerns in the course of

this study. Taking the evidence of de la Mare's work as an editor of poetry, one finds that his three chief anthologies seem in their separate subjects to reflect the poet's emphases in his own writing. Come Hither is for children, Behold, This Dreamer! is concerned with the world of dream in all its manifestations and Love, the latest work, deals with the various facets of that complex abstraction called love.

In considering the first of these, one finds that much of de la Mare's own best work is written for children. He shows a particular appreciation for their lucidity and perhaps, therefore, writing for children as an audience elicits from him the most transparent, clear-sighted of verse. The sub-title of Come Hither, "for the young of all ages", also partly reflects de la Mare's conception of "the child". It is that imaginative, receptive aspect of every human being who is open to the real world, by which, as we have found, de la Mare usually means the "other" world rather than the one of actuality. This final chapter has been an attempt to show how de la Mare's finest lyric gifts find their expression in his poetry for children where he is rhythmically and metrically perhaps more adventurous than in his poetry for adults.

There is no doubt, either, as I have tried to show, that his interest in dream and the preternatural culminates in his poetry for children as he regards them as not yet worn down by the mundane round blunting the sensibilities of many adults. Their reveries and day-dreams are quite naturally interwoven with their everyday lives. Furthermore, the world of the preternatural, of fairies and ogres, has conventionally formed a part of children's literature and de la Mare is thus able to express his profound interest in this area without lack of precedent.

Behold, This Dreamer!, especially its Introduction, has been considered in some depth in Chapter One, but it remains here to emphasize the evidence it provides of de la Mare's commitment to the world of dream

and his view of the wide-ranging imaginative possibilities it provides to the perceptive, receptive adult. De la Mare's own poetry and private comments (to Russell Brain, for instance) serve to endorse the suggestion made by his choice of topic in this anthology that dream forms a very prominent part of his vision of life.

The final anthology, Love, considered in the final section of Chapter Two on the interweaving of themes, presents not so much the central concern of his work - which I maintain throughout this study is dream and the preternatural - but perhaps the ultimate point towards which all else strains: "'The greatest of things is charity...'"

And finally, I hope to have shown - through close considerations of a number of de la Mare's own poems - how dream and the preternatural frequently form the focus of the poet's attention as well as how he employs the device of dream-frames in a variety of cases in order to make points about dream itself and other topics. The effect on his reader is one of mystery, of fascination, of a world light as gossamer but no less significant or real for all that; one which is hidden to the Sheila Lawfords and pragmatic nurses of this world but which is ever-present to the children of dream and Faerie, the Anns who are able to hear the song sung by a phantom-child, the adults who are sufficiently receptive to respond to the mermaid's calling "'Sam!' - quietlike - 'Sam!'" Through dream and sleep, it is suggested by de la Mare, the barriers between "[soul] and reality" are removed: "Thus beauty may / Pierce through the mists that worldly commerce brings"

NOTES

¹ See pp. 134-45 above.

² See pp. 14-15 above for a brief discussion of this point.

³ "Lewis Carroll", in The Eighteen-Eighties: Essays by Fellows of the Royal Society of Literature, ed. Walter de la Mare (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1930), pp. 218-55.

⁴ CH, pp. 5-6; note p. 499; also referred to on p. 7 above.

⁵ CH, p. 6.

⁶ Wordsworth, "Ode on Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood".

⁷ John Rowe Townsend, Written for Children: An Outline of English-language Children's Literature (1974; rpt. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976), pp. 24-26.

⁸ Townsend, p. 47.

⁹ "Lewis Carroll", in The Eighteen-Eighties, pp. 219-20.

¹⁰ Derek Hudson, Lewis Carroll: An Illustrated Biography (London; Constable, 1976), pp. 82-83.

¹¹ See pp. 38-39 above for citation and discussion.

¹² F. J. Harvey Darton, "Children's Books", in vol. XI, The Cambridge History of English Literature (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1962), p. 374.

¹³ Townsend, p. 53.

¹⁴ Darton, p. 387.

¹⁵ See p. 71 above.

¹⁶ Love, pp. 114-15 and 301-02.

¹⁷ Hudson, p. 101.

¹⁸ Townsend, pp. 164-65.

¹⁹ Darton, p. 380.

²⁰ Early One Morning in the Spring: Chapters on Children and on Childhood as it is revealed in particular in Early Memories and in Early Writings (London: Faber, 1935), p. xvi; hereafter cited as EOM.

21 EOM, p. xvi.

22 EOM, p. xx.

23 Leonard Clark. "Walter de la Mare", in Three Bodley Head Monographs (London: Bodley Head, 1968), pp. 147-48.

24 PV, p. 250.

25 PV, p. 248.

26 PS, pp. 175-78.

27 PS, pp. 180-82.

28 See pp. 17-20 above.

29 Crossings, p. 91.

30 See pp. 145-51 above.

31 For discussions of these poems, see pp. 145-46 and 132-35 respectively.

32 See pp. 14 and 131 above for earlier references to this poem.

33 See p. 119-20 and 122-23 above.

34 See p. 114 above.

35 Among these are "The Ruin" (CP, p. 175), "The Ride-by-Nights" (CP, pp. 175-76), "Peak and Puke" (CP, p. 176), "The Changeling" (CP, pp. 176-77), "The Mocking Fairy" (CP, p. 177), "Bewitched" (CP, p. 178) and "The Honey Robbers" (CP, pp. 178-79).

36 Cf. "Jim Jay" (CP, p. 145), discussed on pp. 137-38 above.

37 Among these are "Peak and Puke" (CP, p. 176), "The Changeling" (CP, pp. 176-77), "Solitude" (CP, p. 443), and "The Changeling" (CP, p. 520); and images of changelings appear in "Usury" (CP, pp. 523-24), "Beyond" (CP, p. 525), and "February 29" (CP, p. 526).

38 See pp. 17 and 91 above.

39 See pp. 85-88 for earlier discussions of "The Mocking Fairy" and "The Honey Robbers".

40 For a discussion of this poem, see pp. 132-35 above.

41 For discussions of these poems, see pp. 95-96 and p. 88 respectively.

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